

What is a Midwife?



Midwives in the United States provide health care services for individuals across their lifespan. Midwives partner with you to help make important health decisions. Midwives work with other members of the health care team when needed. A midwife may also be your primary care provider. There are 2 main types of midwives. There are some differences in the services offered by each type of midwife.

What types of midwives are there?

- **Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs) and Certified Midwives (CMs)** are educated in accredited graduate-level midwifery programs and pass a national certification exam. They must have a license to practice midwifery in the state where they work. CNMs and CMs work in all health care settings including hospitals, birth centers, offices or clinics, and the home. CNMs and CMs provide general pregnancy and reproductive health care and primary care throughout the lifespan. They can prescribe most medications. CNMs and CMs can also care for newborns through the first 30 days of life.
- **Certified professional midwives (CPMs)** may have apprenticeship training or graduate from an accredited education program. CPMs take a national certification exam that is not the same as the one CNMs and CMs take. CPMs provide pregnancy, birth, and postpartum care in community settings—usually in birth centers or homes. CPMs care for newborns. CPMs are not able to prescribe most medications. They do not work in hospitals.

Most midwives in the United States are CNMs. CNMs are licensed in all 50 states. Not all states license CMs and CPMs.

What do midwives do?

Both types of midwives provide care during pregnancy, labor, birth, and postpartum. They also care for newborns. CNMs and CMs care for about 1 of every 10 women who give birth each year in the United States. CNMs and CMs also provide reproductive and primary health care which includes annual physical exams, birth control, menopause care, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and other health problems. Midwives work with other health care providers.

Why would I choose a midwife for care during my pregnancy?

Midwives view pregnancy and birth as normal life events that can be a healthy time in your life. Midwives are experts in knowing the difference between normal changes that occur and symptoms that require extra attention. Midwives develop special relationships with those who seek midwifery care. They provide care that includes support and education based on the individual's needs.

Midwives use evidence-based medical procedures when there is a specific concern for the health of you or your baby. They work in partnership with other health care providers who can be available if needed. Midwives offer health care that respects the goals and desires of each individual and family. They value sharing information so patients can make informed choices about their health care.

What if I have a high-risk pregnancy or complication during labor?

Your CNM or CM can prescribe medicine, order tests, and provide treatment for common illnesses that may occur during pregnancy. Midwives work with physicians who specialize in complications of pregnancy. If you have a medical problem during pregnancy or complication during labor, your midwife will work with a physician to make sure you get the best and safest care for you and your baby. Midwives do not perform surgery. If you need to have a cesarean birth, the surgery will be done by the physician who works with your midwife. Your midwife will also work with other health care providers: nurses, pediatricians, social workers, nutritionists, doulas, childbirth educators, physical therapists, and other specialists to help you get the care you need.



What if I want pain medicine during labor?

Your midwife will help you make decisions about how you are going to cope with pain during labor. Midwives can discuss the types of pain you may experience during labor and the different ways that you can manage pain. If you want medicine to cope with your labor pains, your midwife can help you get medicine that is available in the setting where you give birth. Midwives also know other ways to help you cope with labor such as changing positions or being in a tub of water. These can be helpful in addition to pain medications.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Midwife for Your Care during Pregnancy and Birth

- Can you tell me about yourself? Where did you receive your education? How long have you been a midwife? Where would you care for me during childbirth?
- Do you work with other midwives or physicians? What birth settings do you work in?
- How do you feel about birth?
- If I need medication for pain, how would that be handled?
- If you work in a group, who will attend my birth, and who will be there if you are away?
- How do you recommend that I prepare for childbirth?
- Do you provide labor support and stay with me throughout labor?
- Are you comfortable with doulas or family and friends being with me during labor?
- Do you allow moving around and eating or drinking during labor?
- Can I hold my baby right after birth, breastfeed, and not be separated?
- When do you recommend IVs, fetal heart rate monitoring, Pitocin, or episiotomy?
- Do you care for women who want a vaginal birth after a previous cesarean birth?
- Is your care paid for by my insurance?
- If I want to deliver at home, what equipment do you bring, how do you handle problems during labor, and when would we need to go to the hospital?
- For a home or birth center birth, how often do you transfer to the hospital during labor?
- For a home or birth center birth, what physicians do you work with to provide care if problems occur? Would you stay with me if we need to go to the hospital?
- Are you trained in newborn resuscitation?
- How many times will you visit me at home or see me in the office after my baby is born?

For More Information

Discover Midwives

<https://www.discovermidwives.com/what-is-a-midwife/>

National Association of Certified Professional Midwives – Who are CPMs?

Who are CPMs? — NACPM

Childbirth Connection: Choosing a Caregiver

Choosing a Maternity Care Provider (childbirthconnection.org)

Childbirth Connection: Resources

Resources (childbirthconnection.org)

Black Birthing Bill of Rights

<https://thenaabb.org/black-birthing-bill-of-rights/>

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