



Questions to Ask a Caregiver

Asking questions can help you to know whether your caregiver is a good match for your individual needs. Here are suggestions for ways to ask questions in the most effective way.

Before you think about what you are going to ask your caregiver, think about what your own priorities are and what kind of caregiver you are looking for.

Here are suggested questions covering some of the key topics women often want to discuss. If there is a topic you want to explore that's not covered here, talk to your doula about how to discuss it with your caregiver, or use the *open question* format here to come up with your own wording. Remember that an "open question" is one that must be answered with an *explanation*, not just a "yes" or "no," so the answer gives you the most information to go on.

Induction

"Under what circumstances would you suggest an induction to start labor?"

Some caregivers will only start labor artificially for medical indications such as severe high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia; others will routinely suggest induction, for example, on the due date or a few days after; talk to your doula about the pros and cons of induction in different circumstances.

Time limits

"What are your views on time limits during each stage of labor?"

Some caregivers will be happy to watch labor take its course with no time limits, so long as the mother and baby are doing well; others will suggest speeding up labor with drugs after a certain number of hours, or to achieve a certain rate of progress; talk to your doula about the pros and cons of time limits.

Food

"How will you feel if I want to eat and drink during labor?"

Some caregivers are comfortable with you eating and drinking as you please during labor and birth; others will ask that you not eat at all, or take only clear liquids, or only ice chips; talk to your doula about the pros and cons of restricting food and drink in labor

What if you don't agree?

If you have a difference of opinion, you have three possibilities:

Accept your caregiver's preference, if maintaining a comfortable relationship with him is most important to you.

Negotiate a compromise you are both happy with. Keep in mind, this is often not possible, as one or both of you may end up well outside your comfort zone.

Find another caregiver whose views are more compatible with your own.

Only you know which of these paths is right for you. Your doula can help you sort out your priorities, your match with your caregiver's views, and what your options are in case you feel there's a mismatch.

Episiotomy

"How often do you find it is necessary to cut an episiotomy?"

Some caregivers will be accustomed to cutting an episiotomy in a large percentage of cases, or for all first-time mothers; others will cut them only rarely (perhaps for 5 out of 100 women); talk to your doula about the pros and cons of episiotomy and ways to avoid either a cut or a tear.

Position for birth

"How will you feel if I want to be off the bed during labor and for the birth of the baby?"

Some caregivers will insist you are on the bed for labor and/or for the birth of the baby, and may not be experienced catching a baby when the woman is not on the bed on her back; others frequently catch babies when the mother is in all sorts of different positions, such as all-fours, standing, kneeling, and so on. Talk to your doula about the pros and cons of being on and off the bed for labor and birth.

Supporters

"How will you feel if I want to have a doula support me during my labor and birth?"

Some caregivers are enthusiastic about working with a doula as part of the support team; others are not comfortable with this. If your caregiver is not comfortable and you want a supporter there, how will you feel knowing he is not supportive of this?

When you ask these sorts of open questions, *listen* to the way your caregiver responds. Comfortable discussing matters with you? Interested in your perspective and desires? Telling you not to worry about it, he'll take care of everything? Rushed? How do you feel about the way your caregiver responded to your questions? How do you feel about his views?