



An informative brochure for women in Switzerland

Pregnancy **Motherhood**

English Anglais Englisch



Foreword



This brochure provides information about pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. It is also a guide for you and your family to the maternity services which are offered in Switzerland.

You will find Maternity Notes in the front cover of this brochure.

Your professional caregiver will record important information about your pregnancy and expected date of birth in the Notes. These Pregnancy Notes belong to you.



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You are pregnant

Your period is late and you think that you are pregnant. A pregnancy test which you can do even a few days after missing your period will enable you to find out whether you are pregnant or not. You can buy a test kit at the pharmacy and do the test yourself at home. You can also have the test done by your doctor or at a Family Planning centre.

Antenatal checks

The health of mother and baby

Regular antenatal care during pregnancy helps to keep a check on you and your baby's well-being and also to determine that the pregnancy is progressing well.

Where to go and to whom?

For antenatal care you have a choice where you can go and to whom.

- A midwife, who may visit you at home or you can go to her in her practice or birth house
- An obstetrician in a private practice or in hospital
- A general practitioner

You may also alternate between a midwife and a doctor.

The midwife

Midwives work either in hospitals where they are employed or work independently in a practice or birth house.

Independent midwives offer:

- Birth preparation classes
- Antenatal care
- Care during birth at home
- Postnatal care
- Postnatal checks
- Advice on breastfeeding

A list of the independent midwives working in your area and the services she provides can be obtained from the Swiss Federation of Midwives (address see page 20).



When and how often?

You should make an appointment for your first antenatal check in the second or third month of pregnancy. After that, you should continue to have checks every four to six weeks.

If you miss or forget an appointment, try and arrange a new appointment as soon as possible.

How do I make myself understood?

Ideally it is good if you can talk to your professional caregiver in your mother tongue or in a language in which you can express yourself well. If this is not the case, ask for an interpreter.

You can also ask a family member or a friend to accompany you to the antenatal checks.

Antenatal check-ups

At your first antenatal check the midwife or doctor not only does a physical examination, but he or she also asks a lot of questions in order to get to know you. The questions relate to your own health, the health of your family, what illnesses or operations you may have had and details of previous pregnancies and births.

It is very important that you also ask all the questions which are worrying you.

The professional caregiver is obliged to give you comprehensive information about every test and screening which is done. You have the right to decide which tests and prenatal screening should be done.

If you both agree, your partner can of course accompany you to all the antenatal checks and also to the birth.

Maternity Notes

All the findings and results of any tests done during your pregnancy will be recorded in the Maternity Notes. You will find them in the front cover of this brochure.

These Notes help you to be well informed about the progress of your pregnancy. At any time during and after birth they also provide quick and vital information about you, your pregnancy and birth for your professional caregiver.

We recommend that you carry this document with you at all times and bring it to each antenatal check.



Pregnancy: a time of changes

When will the baby be born?

A normal pregnancy lasts 40 weeks, calculated from the first day of your last menstrual period; this is equal to 10 lunar months of 28 days. Babies are rarely born on their actual due date. Birth three weeks before or two weeks after the due date are considered normal.

If a baby is born before 37 weeks, it is called a premature birth. Babies born too early often have serious complications. In order to avoid these complications, it is important to recognise the warning signals of an impending premature birth. If there is any problem arrange a check-up immediately and do not wait for your next appointment.

For further details consult the section «Situations when you must contact your doctor or midwife without delay» (see page 8).

Pregnancy is not an illness

Your body changes quite considerably during pregnancy. Nevertheless pregnancy is not an illness. You can continue with all your activities as you would normally. You can have a swim, take exercise and enjoy sexual intercourse providing you feel fine.

Healthy diet and sufficient rest

It is good for you and therefore also for your baby, to have enough sleep, to eat a healthy diet and to take in enough fluids.



Alcohol, tobacco and medication

The unborn baby is connected to its mother via the umbilical cord. Not only substances which are good for the baby pass via the umbilical cord, it also allows the passage of harmful substances. For this reason pregnant women should not drink alcohol, or smoke and they should avoid places where there is a lot of smoking.

Medication should only be taken on the advice of a health professional.



Situations when you must contact your doctor or midwife without delay:

- If you are bleeding
- If your waters have ruptured
- If you can't feel the baby moving
- If you are vomiting a lot
- If you have severe pain
- If you have a persistent high temperature
- If you have a serious fall or accident
- If you have severe headache or blurred vision
- If you have contractions

Your situation at work

Be careful not to overdo things and go over your limits, stop working if you are in any pain, if you are feeling dizzy or if you are extremely tired. Adapt your energies to your pregnancy. Take care to have a good posture, avoid carrying heavy loads and do not inhale any toxic substances.

Ease the burden of household chores by sharing them with the other members of your family.

Maternity protection

Pregnant or breastfeeding women who are in employment, are protected by law.



The free pamphlet «Employment and Motherhood - Your rights and benefits at work» will give you further information. The pamphlet can be ordered at the Swiss Federation of Midwives and at the office of Travail.Suisse (see page 20).



Birth preparation

At birth preparation classes you will receive a lot of information about pregnancy, the birth and postnatal period, also about breastfeeding and parenthood.

You will learn breathing and relaxation exercises which help to give you a sense of well-being during your pregnancy and prepare you for the birth.

You will also get the chance to exchange ideas and ask questions.

Group classes

In a group you will meet other expectant mothers and other parents. You will get to know each other, have a chance to chat and swap experiences.

In various parts of Switzerland there are classes organised in different languages. Make inquiries if there are classes in your area being offered in your language.

Private courses

If you prefer to have individual birth preparation classes, perhaps in your own home, contact an independent midwife in your area.

Who offers courses?

You will get information about birth preparation classes from your midwife, from your doctor or at the hospital. Health insurance covers part of the costs of such a course if it is run by a midwife or a certified birth preparation teacher.



Place of birth

In Switzerland you can have your baby at home, in hospital or in a birth house. You have the right to give birth in the place of your choice; the cost is covered by your health insurance.

Hospital

You will go to the maternity unit of the hospital for the birth of the baby. Your midwife or doctor will book you in there.

Most hospitals organise informative events on a regular basis which gives you a chance to visit the maternity unit and look around.

Postnatal care in hospital

If you decide to stay in hospital after the baby is born, you will spend the first few days after the birth together with the baby in the maternity unit.

You and your baby will be cared for by the hospital staff, they will help and advise you as required. All the necessary equipment, clothes for the baby and all meals will be provided.

It is also possible to spend the first days after the birth in hospital and then return home where the midwife will look after you at home for the next few days.

Birth in hospital with early discharge

Another option which you may choose is to give birth in hospital and to have an early discharge home, provided that you and your baby are fine.

At home you will be cared for by an independent midwife, she will visit daily up to ten days after the birth. She will care for you and the baby, give support for breastfeeding and answer any questions about motherhood.

You should contact a midwife in your area before the baby is born.



Contract midwives

Contract midwives exist in only a few hospitals. A contract midwife will care for you during your pregnancy, either in your own home or in her practice, she will accompany and attend to you during the birth in hospital and look after you and the baby afterwards.

Giving birth at home

The midwife comes to your home, she cares for you during your pregnancy, the birth and afterwards.

Birth at home is limited to those women who have had a straightforward, uncomplicated pregnancy and whose baby is born around the due date.

Birth house

This is a house which has been set up especially to care for expectant parents. Several midwives work there together and they will care for you during your labour and birth. In the majority of birth houses you can normally stay with your baby for the first few days after the birth.

Check with your health insurance company if the costs will be covered.

Please bring the following documents with you to the birth:

- Maternity Notes
- Blood group card
- Passport, permanent residence permit or temporary residence permit
- Family book or marriage certificate
- Confirmation from the health insurance company that the costs will be covered



The birth

Signs of labour

You may already feel some weak contractions three or four weeks before the birth. These so called Braxton Hicks contractions are not usually painful, you might feel a slight twinge in your back, pain in your lower abdomen as if you were having your period or you may just notice that your abdomen feels hard. A couple of days before the birth begins, you may have a mucous discharge which may be slightly bloodstained. This is completely normal and is nothing to worry about.

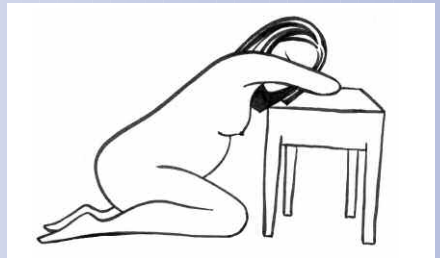
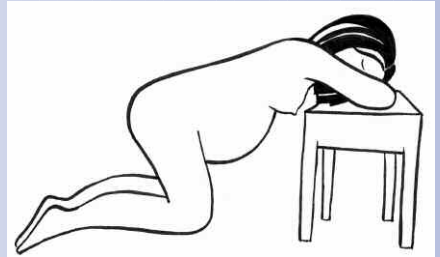
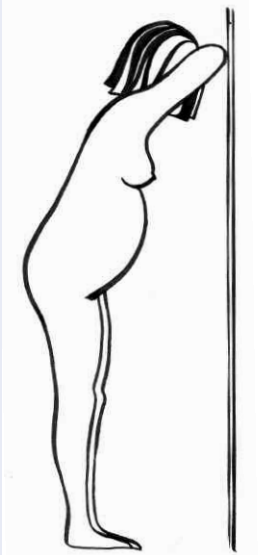
When should you go to hospital or contact your midwife?

- When you are having regular contractions
- When your waters break, even if you have no contractions
- If you are bleeding vaginally

If it is possible telephone the hospital or midwife to let them know you are on your way.

Consider who should be with you during the birth. In Switzerland it is normally your partner, but it can also be your mother, your sister or a friend.





The birth of the baby

It takes time to bring a baby into the world...

The birth is divided into different stages. During the first stage the contractions cause the cervix to open and the baby moves down in the birth canal. This is the longest stage and normally lasts several hours.

During the next stage which is a lot shorter the baby is born. This is the stage when the mother can actively help to bring her baby into the world.

The delivery of the placenta or afterbirth is the final stage. This normally happens in the first hour after the baby is born.

The baby is born

When the baby is born, it begins to breathe, the umbilical cord will be cut and if you wish the baby will be placed in your arms. It will also be put to the breast and later on weighed and measured.

After the birth the baby will be examined by a paediatrician.

Of course you will be present at all the checks done on the baby.



After the birth

The first few days with your new baby

The so called postnatal period begins immediately after the birth and lasts six weeks. It is a period of adaptation, a return to normal. Your body recuperates from the pregnancy and birth and adjusts to the demands of breastfeeding. In order to properly recuperate, you need plenty of rest and a healthy, balanced diet.

Involution of the uterus and the lochia

After the birth the uterus gradually returns to its normal size. For about a month after the birth you will have some vaginal bleeding or discharge, similar to your monthly periods.

When you sneeze, cough, laugh or carry a heavy weight you may have difficulty in controlling your bladder and leak urine. If this continues longer than six weeks ask your doctor or midwife for advice.

If you have abdominal pain and or a high temperature you should contact your doctor or midwife without delay.



Care and healing of your stitches

It takes a few days for the wound from the episiotomy or the vaginal lacerations to heal. The stitches normally dissolve over a period of a week or so.

The vulva and perineum should be kept clean after the birth by rinsing the area regularly with clean water.



A time of adjustment

The birth of a baby entails a huge adjustment not just for the mother, but for the whole family. This is particularly true with the first baby.

It is a good idea to make preparations for your return home with the baby before the birth. Think about who can help with the housework and minding older children, try and organise everything beforehand.

Giving birth is an emotional and tiring experience, some women feel rather low and weepy after the birth. Don't withdraw if you find yourself in this situation. In many areas there are meeting places where you will find support and encouragement and also be able to make friends. This support will help you as you adapt to your new role as a mother.

What you should not do in the postnatal period:

- You should abstain from sexual intercourse as long as you have a vaginal discharge, and if you had stitches until the wound is healed.
- You should not carry anything that is heavy.

First menstruation after birth

Some women have their first period already six weeks after birth, for other women their periods only start again once they have stopped breastfeeding.

It's possible for a woman to conceive even if she has not started her periods again or even while she is still breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is not a method of contraception.

Family planning

If you don't want to get pregnant straightaway, it is important to choose an effective method of contraception.

Seek advice from your doctor, midwife or family planning centre.



You may obtain the free booklet «Couple, Contraception, Aids, Rights, Pregnancy» which is available in hospital, at your doctor's practice or in family planning centres. It is obtainable in many different languages.



Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding for the first six months gives your baby the best possible start in life. Breast milk is the only food naturally designed for your baby. It contains the nutrients your baby needs in the right amounts and they are in a form that is very easily absorbed. Breastfeeding helps to protect your baby from infection because antibodies are passed into the milk. Breast milk is readily available at the correct temperature, it is pure, there is no need to prepare it - and it's free.

When you breastfeed you need to know that what you eat and drink will be passed on to the baby via the milk. So you should avoid consuming alcohol and tobacco or rooms where people are smoking. Medication should only be taken on the advice of your doctor. You need a healthy, balanced diet and make sure you drink a lot.

Your milk supply

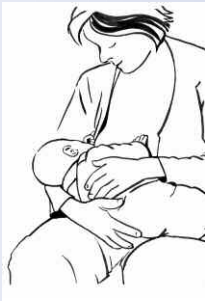
During the first few days your breasts produce a special milk called colostrum. After about three days you will begin to produce a larger amount of proper milk. It is best to feed when your baby wants to be fed. Your breasts produce milk in response to your baby feeding at your breast. The more your baby feeds, the more your body makes milk.

Supplementing breast feeding

For the first six months breastfed babies do not need any additional drinks or baby food. If you do give your baby extra fluids, be sure not to add sugar to the bottle feed. Adding sweeteners can have a negative effect on the development of the baby's teeth.

Breastfeeding at work

You can continue to breastfeed even if you go back to work. Get some advice from your professional caregiver and discuss how to find a solution with your employer.





The first few weeks with your new baby

Postnatal check-ups

The mother

Four to six weeks after the birth, arrange an appointment for a postnatal check with your doctor or midwife. You will not only have a physical examination, but you can also get information about different methods of family planning.

The baby

Four weeks after the birth arrange an appointment for the baby to be checked by your paediatrician or general practitioner. Up to the time they start school, children should have regular check-ups in order to recognise any illness or development problems at an early stage.

Advisory and counselling services

Breastfeeding

If you have any questions, problems or worries in respect of breastfeeding, or if you need help when you want to stop breastfeeding, you can get assistance from a midwife or a breastfeeding counsellor. Three advisory sessions are paid for by your health insurance. For the address of a midwife or breastfeeding counsellor see page 20.

Health Visitors

When you leave hospital, you will be given information about the health visiting services in your area. The health visitor will then contact you personally after the birth. She provides support and advice for all parents with children up to the age of five. She will give advice either by telephone or at a health centre on such subjects as breastfeeding, nutrition, children's development, and on the care and bringing up of children. The service of the health visitor is normally free.



Legal benefits and health insurance cover

A law regulating the entitlement to state maternity benefits in Switzerland came into effect on July 1st 2005. Every working woman whether she is employed or self-employed is entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave and during this time she will receive 80% of her earnings. Ask your employer what you are entitled to.

For anybody who is living and working in Switzerland, basic health insurance is compulsory.

Basic health insurance will provide full coverage (without any personal contribution to the costs) for:

- Six antenatal check-ups by a midwife or seven check-ups by a doctor, two ultrasound scans and blood tests
- Fr 100.- participation towards the cost of birth preparation classes in a group
- The full cost of the birth in the public ward of a hospital, or the costs of a midwife for a birth at home or delivery in a birth house
- Postnatal care by a midwife up to the tenth day after the birth, independent of where the birth took place
- The mother's postnatal check-up by a doctor or midwife between the sixth and tenth week after the birth
- Three breastfeeding consultations

Basic health insurance also covers the following medical treatment, this treatment is however subject to a compulsory personal contribution (franchise) towards the cost. For children the treatment is not subject to a personal contribution (franchise) and only half of the amount in excess of the personal contribution must be paid for.

- Vaccinations (German measles, measles, mumps, tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, poliomyelitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B) and the booster jabs
- Eight check-ups for pre-school children

In case of complications or illness during the pregnancy the costs will be covered by the health insurance depending on the scale of charges.

You have three months to take out health insurance for the baby after it is born. You can also organise the health insurance before the baby is born.

Confidentiality

All professional caregivers are under a vow of secrecy, the so-called professional oath of confidentiality. They must treat any information they receive as confidential and not pass on any information without your consent.



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Maternity Notes

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Order

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