



Fear in pregnancy is very common. The impending birth can feel like it is looming over your head. The unfamiliarity of the birth process is one of the main reasons why some women fear labor and hearing of negative birth experiences contributes to this fear. Extreme fear can actually slow down your progress in labor. Anxiety makes it more difficult to cope with the natural discomfort that is part of every normal birth experience.

Fortunately, there is an effective way to erase the fear of childbirth. It comes down to one simple word: faith

For some women, "faith" means having faith in her doctor. For others, "faith" means having faith in herself; believing she was made to give birth.

Learning how to handle the challenges of labor is what drives most women to childbirth classes. Labor and birth have become so separate from our lives, very few women have actually seen a birth before their first child is trying to be born.

Fear is counterproductive to the labor process. It's easy to focus on fear. Common fears include

- Fear of pain or of every rare complication you have heard about
- Fear of unknown
- Fear of losing control during labor.
- Modesty and being naked or unclothed.
- Concerned about being loud or making noise as you labor.
- Fear of losing control of your bowels
- Fear of something going wrong during the birth, requiring medical intervention.
- Fear that medications can increase the likelihood that you will need added interventions.
- Fear of something being wrong with the baby - Fewer than 1% of all births have these complications
- Fear of dying in labor or birth.

Education is the best way to overcome the fear of the unknown. The more you learn about labor and birth, the less afraid you will become.

Ways to Combat Fear

1. **Taking child birth classes**
2. **Talk to your health care provider and other moms** to help relieve your fears. Be careful who you choose to talk with about your fears. Some people are naturally negative and will tell you every horrible story they've ever heard about birth. Others are more positive and upbeat. This type is better for a first time mother. Think of the people you know with children. Who is the most positive? This is who you want to confide in. She is more likely to be helpful. Keep in mind that negative energy is contagious and so is positive energy. Surround yourself with positive energy to help banish fear.
3. **Attitude:** Your attitude has to do with how you think about labor and your feelings about the process of childbirth. To begin, stop thinking of labor as something that happens to you. Laboring is something you do to give birth to your child. The process of labor is run completely by your body - it is your uterine muscle contracting; your body is creating that powerful sensation. Don't fight the work of your body, let it happen and work with it to the best of your ability. Consider your attitudes about childbirth. Ask yourself where your feelings came from, why do you feel the way you do? The figure out what you need to do to get your attitude right before labor.
4. **Education:** Many times fear is caused by uncertainty, other times it is caused by misinformation. Learning what to expect from a normal labor can help reduce those fears. Learn to tell the difference between what is normal and what is not normal. Learn about the options you have, including their potential benefits and risks. Learn some techniques to handle the parts of labor you are most concerned about.
5. **Support:** You may find yourself less frightened if you know you will not be alone during labor. Choose caregivers and attendants who will remain with you the birth process. Make sure everyone invited to your labor is supportive of the choices you have made. You may also want to look into hiring a doula to help you with labor.
6. **Realistic Expectations:** Be careful of stories from others and remember many bad outcomes come from lack of education. Don't dismiss all concern about the pain of childbirth and don't believe stories that paint labor as the next worst thing to death. Understand many of the women who share such stories were not educated before labor began. Keep your expectations of labor realistic even if that means not listening to any more "horror stories."
7. **Take Control:** Find out what options are available in your local community and select caregivers and a birth place with the options you want. Use a birth plan to work with your caregivers to make the best decisions possible before labor begins, and continue the working relationship in labor. Be a part of the decision making, selecting carefully how you handle unexpected situations.

