

# DOULA — birth companion

by Mara Jacob & Ursula Oetiker Egli

**The birth of your child is a unique experience that you will remember your entire life. Whether you are having a natural birth or a caesarean, to breast or bottle feed your child, the services of a doula will provide you and your family with emotional, physical and informational support during pregnancy, throughout the hours of labour, up to the first postpartum weeks.**

*'My Doula was simply amazing! Before, during and after the birth, she was a tremendous help. It was extremely comforting to be able to speak English with her and to tap into her 'mommy knowledge' especially as we are not Swiss and don't know all the resources and helpful things that exist here to care for a baby. I'm so grateful for the experience'.*

- Stephanie, first-time mother

The word "doula" comes from the ancient Greek meaning "a woman who serves", and is now used to refer to a trained and experienced professional who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to parents.. A doula continues an old tradition whereby the expectant mother is accompanied during the birth by a trusted woman who is a mother herself. She does not replace the midwife, a doctor or the partner but rather complements them.

The doula is not responsible for any medical action and therefore can concentrate on the couple. She is well trained and has good knowledge of the various topics around childbirth and pregnancy. She knows and understands the emotional needs of parents-to-be. The doula creates an atmosphere of emotional security during this exciting but sometimes stressful period of life. She helps by giving stability during pregnancy, childbirth and the first weeks with the newborn. Studies have shown that this method of birth support can offer many benefits. The birth experience of mother, father and child is affected in a positive way.

## ***The power of education***

As doulas, we believe in the "nature" of a woman's body to bring forth a baby. We also believe strongly in the power of education. It is our responsibility to provide the best evidence

based information available to our clients so that they, in turn, can make informed choices that best serve their needs. We believe that every woman has the right to understand her body and the labour process – to know what each stage and phase of labour entails, what it might feel like, and what her choices are.

The old adage that knowledge is power is as true in the birthing process as it is in other aspects of life. Yet for most first-time mothers, the only exposure they have had to the labour process comes from movies and television, in which the birthing mother is rarely depicted as anything other than distressed and in intense pain. Giving birth is hard work to be sure, but the better prepared one is physically and emotionally, the easier it can be.

Everyone fears the unknown, but fear is not beneficial to a labouring mum. Few people would ever consider running a marathon without training their body and mind for the event, yet birthing mothers are often expected to meet the challenge of labour with little or no advance preparation. We advocate that birthing mothers and their partners take an extended preparation course, whether they have chosen relaxation and breathing as their primary techniques for managing the pain or discomfort of labour, or whether they have decided to use medication.

## ***Recollections from a dad***

Before meeting our doula we already had a lovely two-year old boy, but somehow we still did not consider the first birth as a success story. In retrospect, I feel that we were not prepared enough. Of course we attended a preparation course, had regular examinations, and visited several doctors. But when things did not advance during the labour and we ended up having a caesarean section. It was really hard to go to the operating room with my wife, but thankfully we had a healthy son at the end.

We decided to prepare and try our utmost to have a natural birth with the second child – as long as it did not present a health risk. My wife consulted numerous books and people and found a doctor and hospital who would support us. Given the experience of the first birth, I did not feel as if I could fully support her. Actually I felt frightened when the due date was approaching. That was the point when she came out with the idea of hiring a doula accompany us, and we visited Mara Jacob. At first I was not very enthusiastic, but the most we could lose was some money and time spent for consultations. Hence, it was time to slow down, as this birth was the most important concern for us at that time.

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Mara did not have a great deal of experience with a vaginal birth after a caesarean (VBAC), and our case was a real challenge for her. She dedicated an incredible amount of energy –she read more literature, offered really useful advice and consultations, and she accompanied us to other specialists, as only specific people in the region possessed the knowledge that we were lacking. That was exactly the support that we needed and I felt that Mara could help my wife if I fell out.

Finally, the birth took only around six hours. Mara helped Zsuzsi reduce the pain with massage at each contraction. Thanks to Mara's support, Zsuzsi gave birth to a beautiful 4155g girl, Fruzsina. Midwives and doctors were amazed at the coordinated work. My mind was rather blocked for weeks and could not believe that we managed to work out everything as planned. I hope that doulas, with their enthusiasm and knowledge, will help many more mothers and families.

- Marci, second-time father

'As a mother of three young boys, I have learned from experience that a woman in labour deserves to be nurtured, to be heard and respected, and to be free to surrender herself to the birthing experience. For most women, giving birth will be unlike any experience she has ever had and it may completely change the way she views herself and the world. As a doula, I am therefore honoured every time a woman has allowed me to share that journey with her.'

- Mara Jacob, Doula

'I just accompanied the tenth birth as a doula and just now I am on duty for the next one. Every bearing mother, every couple is unique – and every birth is, too! To be a trusted partner in this intense period of life is wonderful.'

- Ursula Oetiker Egli, Doula



In Switzerland, the first trained doulas started to work in 1996. Today, the Swiss Association of Doulas 'Doula CH' has 81 members. For more information visit [www.doula.ch](http://www.doula.ch). ■

#### About the authors:

**Mara Jacob** lives with her husband and their three little boys aged 5, 4 and 2 in Thalwil near Zurich. She has worked as a doula since 2009.  
[www.geburtsbegleitung-mara.ch](http://www.geburtsbegleitung-mara.ch)

**Ursula Oetiker Egli**, married, mother of two girls, lives in Zurich. Working as a doula since 2008, Board member of 'Doula CH', Ursula lived as an expat-child in Singapore for six years; her parents later moved to Indonesia before returning to Switzerland for good.  
[www.doula-zuerich.ch](http://www.doula-zuerich.ch)

## BIRTH DOULA SERVICES GENERALLY INCLUDE

### INITIAL INTERVIEW

#### PRENATAL CARE

- Two prenatal visits to discuss comfort measures, answer any questions and alleviate any concerns.
- Assisting in the design of your birth plan for an easier birthing experience.
- Information about breastfeeding and where to get help if problems arise.
- Training in visualization and relaxation techniques.
- Suggestions for a more comfortable pregnancy & birth.
- Telephone and Email support throughout pregnancy and immediate postpartum.

#### LABOR AND BIRTH

- Being on-call two weeks before and after your due date.
- Helping you in asking the right questions so that you can make informed decisions about the care of you and your baby.
- Massage and other nonmedical alternative pain relief measures during labor.
- Continuous, uninterrupted support throughout labor and birth and immediate postpartum.
- Labor and birth positioning suggestions for comfort and labor progress.
- Providing an environment such that the birth partner is able to focus on the birth experience and can direct his attention to loving and supporting the laboring mother.
- Assisting the partner and family members as needed.

#### POSTPARTUM CARE:

- Two Postpartum follow up visits (one shortly after giving birth, one later) to reflect the birth and discuss open questions regarding the life with a newborn.
- Postpartum support via phone/email as needed.

**TOTAL FEE:** CHF 800.00 to CHF1000.00

