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## Prenatal Testing and Informed Consent

There are so many tests and procedures that pregnant women are offered as part of routine care these days. This handout will help you get the information you need to decide which ones to have or decline. Each woman will make different decisions based on her individual situation, beliefs and values.

You should not feel pressured by your caregivers. There should be an atmosphere where you feel comfortable to ask questions and where your choices are respected. Take time to do your research and then decide. Even in labor you can say, "We'd like some time alone to consider".

Some things to think about regarding prenatal testing are:

What will you do if the tests show a likelihood of a baby affected by genetic or other disorder? Will you have an abortion? If not, perhaps you might opt to skip the tests. Some parents want to know even if they will not have an abortion so that they can prepare.

The uncertainty while waiting for test results changes your experience of pregnancy. Women find they keep themselves from getting attached to the baby in case they choose to terminate the pregnancy. Some women feel very stressed about the testing procedures themselves. They find they cannot relax and enjoy the pregnancy and start loving the baby until all the tests are done. Some women feel stressed not doing the tests. Only you know what's right for you.

Some tests are not very accurate or may not change anything about the course of your prenatal care or birth.

Tests cannot tell everything. There are some things that will not be picked up or findings may be inconclusive requiring follow up with other tests or procedures. Tests may not be able to predict the severity of the effect on the baby. For example: The baby may have Down's Syndrome but be minimally affected. S/he will be able to go to school and live an independent life or s/he may be severely affected. Even if you have every test available the baby could be affected by something there is no test for.

Testing is not prenatal care.

There is a difference between nourishing yourself and your baby to promote health and looking for problems. Prenatal care is what you do every day for yourself and your baby. Eating well, being active, minimizing stress, having supportive relationships, educating yourself, sending love to your baby and yourself will nourish your body, mind and spirit. These things are what will do the most to help your body function well and grow a healthy baby. Testing is screening for problems.

Procedures for birth

Many procedures or common practices used to "manage" birth have not been well researched or shown to be of true benefit for mothers and babies. Episiotomy is one example. Ask your caregiver what they do routinely, find out all you can about

the procedures and decide whether or not you want them done to you. If you find that you and your caregiver disagree on too many things you may want to change to another caregiver who is more compatible.

Intuition or inner knowing is a valid source of information. Mothers know inside themselves what is going on with themselves and their babies. This intuition is very important and can be very accurate when practiced. Take time to tune in to yourself and your baby. Sometimes you need help with contacting your inner wisdom and sorting out the inner voices. Find people in your area that can support you in your efforts and help you with this. Use a combination of reason and inner knowing to make your decisions.

Some resources you might find helpful:

Books:

The Thinking Woman's Guide to a Better Birth- Henci Goer

Ina May's Guide to Pregnancy- Ina May Gaskin

A Good Birth, A Safe Birth: Choosing and Having the Childbirth Experience You Want- Diana Korte

Birthing From Within- Pam England

Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering- Sarah Buckley

A Guide to Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth- Murray Enkin, others

Immaculate Deception- Suzanne Arms

Books by Michel Odent

Websites:

[www.childbirthconnection.org](http://www.childbirthconnection.org)

[www.cfmidwifery.org](http://www.cfmidwifery.org)

[www.motherfriendly.org](http://www.motherfriendly.org)

[www.ican-online.org](http://www.ican-online.org)

[www.mothersnaturally.org](http://www.mothersnaturally.org)

[www.cochrane.org/reviews/](http://www.cochrane.org/reviews/)

## QUESTIONS FOR TESTS AND PROCEDURES

Use these questions to help you get information to make a decision as to whether to have a test or procedure done.

You have the right to know everything about your care. You have the right to refuse any treatment or test. You have the right to choose who will take care of you. Use both your head and heart to make the best choices for yourself.

### TESTS

\* What is the name of this test?

\*What information will this test give?

\*What will it not tell?

\*Are there any risks associated with this test?

\*Are there other ways to get the same information?

\*How accurate is this test? Can it give a false negative or positive result?

\*If the results are negative, what will be done next?

\*If the results are positive, what will be done next?

\*What if you choose not to have this done?

## PROCEDURES

- \*What is the reason for this procedure?
- \*What are the benefits?
- \*What are the risks or side effects?
- \*How is the procedure done?
- \*Does this procedure always work? If not, why and how often?
- \*If this procedure doesn't work, what will be done next?
- \*What other choices are available?
- \*What are the potential consequences of not having the procedure done?

To refuse a procedure if a practitioner is not paying attention to your wishes you can strongly state "I refuse to consent to\_\_\_\_\_"

Using your BRAIN helps you to remember what questions to ask.

B= Benefits

R= Risks

A= Alternatives

I= Intuition. What is your gut feeling telling you?

N= Now or never? Do we have to decide now? When? What if we do nothing?

The Birth Survey: <http://thebirthsurvey.com/index.html> Give feedback on your birth caregiver, institution, experience.