

# BIRTH TERMS EXPLAINED:

## *A Simple Glossary for Parents-to-Be*

### **Antenatal**

The period during pregnancy before your baby is born.

### **Antenatal Classes**

Birth preparation sessions covering pregnancy, labour, birth, postpartum recovery and early parenting.

### **Apgar Score**

A quick check that's done just after your baby is born. Your baby's Appearance, Pulse, Grimace, Activity and Respiration are assessed. Each one gets a score from 0 to 2, and the total adds up to a score between 0 and 10. It helps show how well your baby is doing in those first few minutes.

### **Birthing Centre**

A midwife-led facility, usually for low-risk pregnancies, offering a more home-like environment for birth.

### **Birth Preferences / Plan**

A written outline of your preferences for labour and birth. Covering things like pain relief, birth positions, interventions, atmosphere, newborn care and who you want as your birth support team.

### **Bloody Show** (Mucus Plug)

A small amount of blood and mucus released before labour begins – a sign the body is getting ready.

### **Braxton Hicks**

Irregular, practice contractions experienced as the uterus prepares for labour.

### **Caesarean Section** (C-Section)

A surgical procedure to deliver the baby via an incision in the abdomen. It can be planned or unplanned.

### **Cervix**

The lower, donut-shaped part of the uterus that softens and dilates during labour to create an exit for the baby.

### **Colostrum** (Liquid Gold)

The first milk your body produces – thick, nutrient-rich and full of antibodies. May be yellow, white, clear or orange.

### **Contractions** (Surges)

Tightenings of the uterus that help to open the cervix and push the baby down during labour.

### **Cord Clamping**

The cutting of the umbilical cord. Can be immediate or delayed allowing more blood from the placenta to transfer to the baby. Up to 30% of baby's blood can be in the placenta at birth.

### **Crowning**

When the baby's head becomes visible at the vaginal opening – often called the “ring of fire” due to the sensation of the perineum stretching.

### **Dilation**

The opening of the cervix, measured in centimetres from 0 to 10. When it reaches 10 cm, you're “fully dilated”.

### **Doula**

A trained support professional who helps emotionally and practically before, during and after birth. Not a medical role, but very knowledgeable.

### **Due Date / EDD** (Estimated Due Date)

The estimated date your baby is expected to be born. Only about 5% of babies are born exactly on this date.

### **Epidural**

A form of pain relief injected into the spine to numb the lower half of the body during labour.

### **Episiotomy**

A surgical cut made to the vaginal wall and perineum, often used during assisted or emergency births. The cut can be mediolateral (cut at an angle) or midline (a straight cut downward).

### **Fetal Movement**

Movements felt by the pregnant person, such as kicks. They usually increase in frequency as pregnancy progresses.

### **Forceps**

Tong-shaped tools used to assist in delivering the baby's head when needed.

### **Gas and Air (Entonox)**

A mix of oxygen and nitrous oxide breathed in during labour for pain relief.

### **Gestation**

The length of pregnancy, typically around 40 weeks from the first day of the last menstrual period.

### **HBAC (Home Birth After Caesarean)**

Giving birth at home after having had a previous caesarean.

### **Induction of Labour**

Artificially starting labour through methods like membrane sweep, medication, or synthetic hormones.

### **Informed Consent**

The process of receiving clear, balanced, and evidence-based information about a procedure, intervention, or care option. It involves understanding the benefits, risks, and alternatives, and giving voluntary permission without pressure or coercion.

### **Labour**

The process of giving birth – from the onset of contractions to delivery of the baby and placenta.

### **Maternity Unit**

The hospital department providing care before, during and after birth.

### **Meconium**

A baby's first poo – thick, sticky, and greenish-black. It's typically passed in the first few hours or days after birth.

### **Midwife**

A trained health professional supporting pregnancy, labour, birth and postpartum recovery.

### **Microbiome**

The collection of microorganisms – including bacteria, viruses, fungi and other microbes – that live on and in the body. A baby's microbiome begins forming at birth, especially through vaginal delivery and skin-to-skin contact, and supports long-term health and immunity.

### **Neonatal**

Relating to newborns, typically the first 28 days of life.

### **Perinatal**

The period shortly before, during and after birth – generally from about 20 weeks of pregnancy to a few weeks postpartum.

### **Perineum**

The area between the vagina and anus. It may stretch, tear, or be cut during childbirth (see Episiotomy).

### **Physiological Birth**

A birth that unfolds without medical interventions or pharmaceutical pain relief.

### **Placenta**

The organ that develops in the uterus during pregnancy to provide oxygen and nutrients to the baby.

### **Postnatal**

The period after birth when the birthing person's body recovers and adjusts to caring for the newborn.

### **Premature (Preterm)**

Birth before 37 weeks gestation. Premature babies may need special medical support.

### **Skin-to-Skin**

Placing the newborn directly against your bare chest after birth – supports bonding, temperature regulation, and breastfeeding.

**Stretch and Sweep** A method of induction used in late pregnancy. With consent, a midwife or doctor will insert their gloved hand and sweep a finger inside the cervix to separate the membranes surrounding the baby. This can help release hormones (prostaglandins) that may stimulate labour.

### **TENS Machine**

A device used in early labour that sends mild electrical pulses through pads to relieve pain.

### **Third Stage of Labour**

The stage after the baby is born, when the placenta is delivered.

### **Transition**

The, often most intense, stage of labour before the down/pushing stage begins.

### **Trimester**

Pregnancy is divided into three trimesters, each lasting about three months.

### **Ultrasound**

A scan using sound waves to create images of the baby in the uterus.

### **Umbilical Cord**

The cord that connects the baby to the placenta, supplying oxygen and nutrients.

### **Uterus**

The muscular organ where the baby grows and develops during pregnancy.

### **VBAC (Vaginal Birth After Caesarean)**

Delivering vaginally after having a caesarean in a previous pregnancy.

### **Vernix**

A creamy, white substance that coats and protects the baby's skin in the uterus.

### **Waters Breaking**

The rupture of the amniotic sac, releasing amniotic fluid – usually a sign labour is starting or has begun.