

# HOMEBIRTH



The National  
Maternity Hospital



COMMUNITY  
MIDWIVES

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*JANE HOMEBIRTH 2010 and 2008 'no matter how many books you read or yoga classes you attend when the birthing process begins it is the inert wisdom inside yourself that kicks in and tells you what you need to do...its what were made for having said that being equipped and prepared means that you have a lot of options to draw on as you cant predict how your birthing experience will be in advance'*

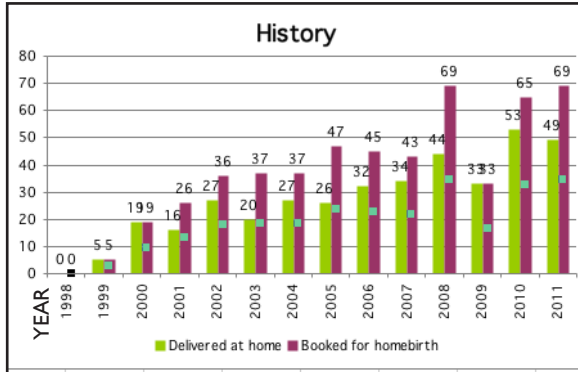


The Community Midwifery Team in the National Maternity Hospital has been proudly offering a homebirth service since 1999. Since the service commenced we have had over 400 babies born at home. These are both first time mothers and women having subsequent babies.

Our philosophy is that the birth process is not just a physical act but profound social and psychological life event. Our aim is to facilitate informed choice and to foster a non interventionist, non intrusive approach to birth whenever possible within the realms of safe midwifery practice.

As midwives working at the NMH we recognise that child-birth is a life enhancing event.

*JANE, HOMEBIRTH, 2010 and 2008 "No matter how many books you read or yoga classes you attend when the birthing process begins it is the inert wisdom inside yourself that kicks in and tells you what you need to do...it's what were made for. Having said that, being equipped and prepared means that you have a lot of options to draw on as you can't predict how your birthing experience will be in advance."*



The homebirth service offers midwifery care from the beginning of pregnancy, during labour and until your baby is up to 10 days old.

Our team takes pride in this service and we hope the following information booklet is useful in helping you and your partner explore whether a homebirth is a suitable option for you.

We have strict inclusion criteria. Research has shown that appropriate selection of women, combined with care by an experienced midwife, ensures homebirths are as safe as hospital births.

*FIONA, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "I enjoy homebirths because it's such a privilege to be part of a very special event in which a baby is born and welcomed into their own home. The satisfaction I feel when all are tucked up in bed before I leave is indescribable!"*

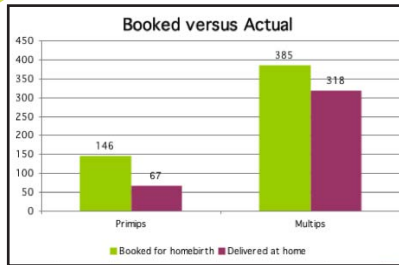
# 4.

## BENEFITS OF HOMEBIRTHS



- Antenatal care with the team at home or in our external clinics.
- One-to-one antenatal education with advice on how to prepare your body and mind for birth and parenting.
- Minimal intervention and full involvement in the decision making process.
- Being in the privacy of your own home with the freedom to create your own birthing environment while including support people of your choice.
- Two qualified midwives are present for birth.
- Greater freedom to mobilise and labour instinctively.
- Option to use birthing pool in labour. Use of alternative pain coping options.
- You, your partner and your other children are not separated following the birth of your baby.
- All postnatal care is in the comfort of your own home.

*SINEAD, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "To me, being a midwife is someone who can work in all areas of maternity care. Practising homebirths I feel epitomises midwifery care at its best. To close the door late at night and leave a new family cuddled up in bed with their new baby is special. Leaving them safe and well, I feel like Father Christmas on Christmas eve delivering an exciting present....."*



- Are you generally healthy with no medical problems?
- Have you a BMI less than 30?
- Was your previous baby born vaginally?
- Did you get pregnant spontaneously?
- Were you more than 37 weeks and no greater than 42 weeks when in labour?
- Are both your partner and you committed to the idea of a homebirth?

If you answer yes to these questions then you are a perfect candidate to be considered for homebirth.

### IS OUR HOME SUITABLE?

Women give birth in all shapes and sizes of houses. The most important thing is that you feel at home. We require that there is mobile phone coverage for the midwives to call the second midwife!

Heating, water and ambulance access are the basic needs.

*ALAN, HOMEBIRTH, 2010 "Before we had our daughter at home, I confess I was slightly nervous. I seemed to focus more on what might go wrong, rather than what would go right. After asking some questions and doing some research, I was reassured that birth at home is just as safe (some would argue safer) than birth in hospital."*



The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) support homebirth for women with uncomplicated pregnancies. There is evidence to show that women labouring at home increases a women's likelihood of a birth that is both satisfying and safe.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE ARE COMPLICATIONS?

Routinely, the ambulance service, Assistant Director of Midwifery and the Delivery Ward are informed by the midwife once you go into labour.

If there are complications with your labour you will be advised to transfer to hospital in an ambulance. The Community Midwife will continue to care for you in the labour ward with the assistance of the hospital-based midwifery and obstetric team. The majority of women who need to transfer from homebirth would have a complication which occurs in late pregnancy. If you go into labour at home the transfer rate is very low.

As standard practice, we carry emergency resuscitation equipment with us to all homebirths.

*TERESA, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "After all the birth preparation and the homebirth is complete the family can immediately cuddle up together and welcome the newborn into the world! No better payment can ever be had for a days/ nights work!"*

When you are around 28 weeks pregnant, a Community Midwife will visit you at home and discuss consent forms. We will outline the circumstances where a homebirth is appropriate and discuss the potential reasons why a transfer to hospital-based care may be advised. We would hope that your birth partner is present for this home visit.



In Holland, where homebirth with skilled midwives has been proven to be safe and cost effective, obstetricians and hospitals are reserved for women and baby considered at risk. In Holland, as many as 65 000 women give birth at home every year representing almost 30% of all pregnant women. As a result, Holland has the lowest rate of caesarean's among western countries.

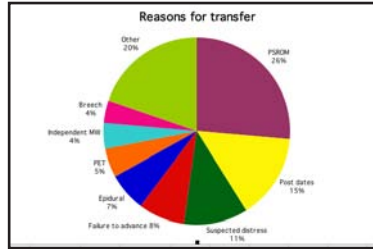
*FERGUS, HOMEBIRTHS AND DOMINO BIRTH, 2011, 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006 "In reflecting on whether to have a homebirth we asked ourselves many questions. As giving birth is natural and has been happening since the time of Eve, one insightful question was why should we give birth in a hospital? This reversed the normal question of why have a homebirth? And we concluded that we had the best of both worlds with the Community Midwives, the potential of a homebirth with the support of the NMH (National Maternity Hospital)."*



# 8.

## REASONS FOR TRANSFER OF CARE

Statistically, if this is your first baby, there is a 50% chance that you will birth at home. This rises to 90% if it is not your first baby. Internationally figure's are very similar. Some women unfortunately do not fulfill their desire to have a homebirth under the care of the Community Midwives. The following chart represents the main reasons why care was transferred from home to hospital:



<b>PRSOM - Prolonged Spontaneous Rupture of Membranes</b>	26%	waters broken for greater than 18 hours
<b>Other</b>	20%	e.g. Breech, before 37 weeks/ small/large baby
<b>Postdates</b>	15%	more than 42 weeks pregnant
<b>Suspected Distress</b>	11%	Abnormal heart rate for baby or abnormal colour of liquid around the baby
<b>Failure to advance in labour</b>	8%	Long labour with slow progress
<b>Epidural</b>	7%	Requesting epidural
<b>PET - Pre-eclampsia</b>	5%	High blood pressure
<b>Independent Midwife</b>	4%	Transfer of care
<b>Breech</b>	4%	Baby not engaged for delivery

FERGUS, *HOMEBIRTHS AND DOMINO BIRTH, 2011, 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006* "While we had some concerns, we grew in confidence as we got to know the midwives. When it came to subsequent births, we registered for a homebirth as soon as my wife was expecting."

You can discuss having a homebirth with the Community Midwives at your first visit or any time in your pregnancy up to 32 weeks

### WHO WILL CARE FOR ME AND MY BABY AT HOME?

The Community Midwives will carry out your antenatal care at home after your initial booking visit or in one of our clinics. We visit you at home to give you information on birthing and to help you prepare for the birth of your baby. (This also helps the midwives find your home at 3am!) We recommend you to do combined care with your GP. This means every second visit is with your GP. The GP combined care scheme is free of charge and they will see you and your baby for your 6 week postnatal check.



Once you are in established labour, a midwife will provide all your care at home. A second midwife will attend for the actual birth. A midwife will stay for at least two hours following your baby's birth and ensure you and your baby are well prior to leaving.

Your baby will require an examination by a pediatrician either in the hospital or at your local GP practice on the 2nd postnatal day.

*EMILY, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "There are too many positives to having a homebirth, the question should be why aren't you having one?"*

# 10. HOW WILL THE MIDWIVES MONITOR MY BABY AT HOME?

The midwife will listen to your baby's heart beat and record it at regular intervals. We use a hand-held sonicaid to do this (the same used by your Community Midwives at your antenatal appointments).



## WHAT ABOUT MY OTHER CHILDREN?

Some women arrange for their other children to be cared for elsewhere by a friend when they go into labour; while others are happy for them to be present, in the house during birth. It is important that you try to have someone available so that your birth partner can concentrate on supporting you. You will need to have childcare arranged just in case you need to transfer to hospital. Tell your children what noises and sounds to expect. There are a number of books and DVDs about childbirth geared for children. It can sometimes be distracting for a mother to have other children around and sometimes can interfere with labour progress while other times it works well for the family. Keep your options open!



*UNA, HOMEBIRTH "I was able to just move out of my head and just let go and be in my body and follow where it was bringing me - and go with it. I felt I didn't have to protect and look out for myself as I was being looked after completely and I had complete confidence in the process - my body, my husband, my midwives and my baby."*

Most homebirths produce very little mess, which is easily contained with some forward planning. The midwives will bring large disposable pads and you can prepare some water proof sheeting (old shower curtain or mattress protector) to protect the surface where you plan to give birth. The midwives will dispose of the placenta, cord and any other soiled waste appropriately.



### CAN I EAT AND DRINK?



It is essential that you take plenty of fluids in labour, as dehydration causes the contractions to slow down. Jugs of iced water are usually very popular, but you may want to look at other options, such as dilute juice.

*CLODAGH, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "It is a natural and beautiful event in a natural and relaxed environment."*

# 12.

## WHAT PAIN COPING OPTIONS DO I HAVE?

It is a well-documented fact that women who give birth at home consistently rate their experience as less painful than a hospital birth. There are many options for pain relief at your homebirth. Some useful methods for coping with your contractions are as follows:

- Good mental attitude and antenatal preparation.
- Breathing - Breathing slowly, panting or blowing.
- Changing positions – At home you are free to move as freely as you wish to find the best position to suit your needs.
- TENS – Transcutaneous Electronic Nerve Stimulation.
- Self hypnosis – Learnt through programmes such as hypnobirthing.
- Water – Warm water by using a pool, shower or bath.
- Entonox is provided for you when you are in active labour, if requested.
- Vocalisation – Sighing, moaning.
- Movement – Swaying, walking, dancing, circulating hips.
- Massage, aromatherapy, homeopathy.
- Heat pack alternated with cold pack.

*ALAN, HOMEBIRTH, 2010 “What really highlighted the difference between homebirth and hospital birth to me was that 15 minutes later my partner was lying on the couch nursing our baby daughter, and we were all enjoying a cup of tea together as a family. It felt like the most natural thing on earth, which of course, it is.”*



The Community Midwives strongly recommend that you have a pool to use for pain relief during your labour, particularly if it is your first baby. We offer a water labour but not a water birth.

We all know how good it feels to have a long, hot bath, so imagine just how therapeutic warm water can be during labour. Indeed, the majority of women are surprised to note how wonderful and relieving it feels when they first enter the birthing pool.

*“A water pool offers a mother an environment where she can behave instinctively and feel in control. When a woman feels in control during childbirth, she experiences a higher degree of emotional well-being postnatally.” (Green et al, 1990)*

*KATE, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE “As a midwife all I ask is that you dare to be curious about home birth. You may be pleasantly surprised with what you discover.”*

# 14. CAN I USE A POOL FOR THE LABOUR AND BIRTH?



It's worth having a birth pool mainly for these reasons:

- There is very strong evidence that water immersion during the first stage of labour reduces the use of analgesia and reported maternal pain, without adverse outcomes on labour duration, operative delivery or neonatal outcomes.
- It allows you to relax floating weightlessly in your own haven of warm water.
- Water allows more freedom of movement to adopt more active birthing positions. Women often switch from forwards leaning to other upright positions. This movement helps the rotation and descent of the baby's head.
- The pool gives a sense of privacy and provides a peaceful environment.

*SHANNON, HOMEBIRTH "At any stage if anything indicates that there may be problems the midwives get you into hospital. They are not in the business of endangering anyone and they have a very high level of expertise. I didn't realise until we were having our second child at home that every midwife on this scheme is of the highest qualification and when you have your baby at home you have the complete attention of two of them!"*

Pools can be bought as cheaply as they can be rented. The Community Midwives keep the names of couples wishing to sell their pools. We are happy to give you the necessary contact details to arrange purchasing it.

There are many different types of pools. There are a few useful websites at the back of this booklet which give all the necessary information on buying a pool.

### **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR THE POOL**

- Ensure you have something soft, (like a duvet or yoga mat) under the pool as it will prevent your knees from getting sore from being on all fours position in the pool.
- A large plastic sheet under the pool may protect your floor covering.
- A large sheet of bubble wrap will act as an insulator to keep the pool to the required temperature.
- Ensure that all the tap fittings fit your taps well in advance of your labour commencing.
- It is advisable that you check your pool (even if new) for leaks and the length of time it takes to fill.

*BERNIE, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "I think it's safe to say everyone of us on the team love the homebirth part of our work. There is something really special about doing our job in the privacy and comfort of a person's home."*



Small tears may be left to heal naturally. Should you require stitches the Community Midwives are able to suture minor tears or episiotomies at home. If the tear is more complex you will need to transfer to hospital for suturing but this is exceptionally rare.

You will be given advice regarding the care of your stitches and plenty of pain relief for the suturing process.

## HOME BIRTH INFORMATION FOR PARTNERS

Birth is mainly a mother's time. The power which her body follows in order to open and let the baby emerge is a primal force of nature. What the birthing woman asks for is what she needs. You will be proud of the strength she displays. You can not 'fix the contractions' but you can support her through them. Your role as a potential parent is to go along with her needs and support her through this process.



*JANE AND JOHN, 3 HOME BIRTHS "Labour on a sunny June bank holiday walking around the garden and stopping between contractions to read a bit of Salinger under the apple tree, knowing the midwife was on her way and that you were safe and minded - not quite as they paint it in the movies is it?"*



Although it may be difficult for you to watch your partner in pain and discomfort, remember that your baby will arrive soon and that this is a natural process.

It is your choice as to how involved you are. We have progressed from complete exclusion of partners in the birth to demanding their presence. It is between you and your partner to find what works best for you, and there is plenty of middle ground. You and your partner will only be pregnant and birthing a few precious times in this life. Enjoy and cherish these experiences.

*SYLDA AND MARK, FIRST TIME HOME BIRTHEER, "From the start of the pregnancy right through to the fantastic postnatal aftercare the community midwives provided a really personal, professional service and inspired confidence in this first time mum! If only every expecting mother was lucky enough to be in their care."*

## 18. BARBARA'S 2010 "PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION"

While it can be daunting to choose a homebirth – many people have misinformed or misconceived opinions on having your baby at home – there are ways in which you can prepare yourself mentally for the experience. This may help you to feel more confident in your choice. It will also help you to field queries from curious family members and friends.



Practise being in control – the midwives are there to facilitate the labour and birth safety, but it is YOU doing the 'work'. Being aware of your fears and being realistic about birth can help you to feel more in control during the birthing experience.

*MARGARET, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE "I have tried to master the art of natural labour, massage and developed tricks to help women cope and progress labour. I love to be able to help women empower themselves and have personal belief and also believe in the normal process of birth."*



1. Make an informed choice – read the research and literature provided in this booklet and others available: Make a list of questions to ask the midwives when they visit and talk to people who have had homebirths
2. Recognise your fears and be open about them – talk to your partner, family, friends, Community Midwives or whomever you feel comfortable with about your worries. Often simply talking about your fears can help to mitigate them. "Courage is not the absence of fear; but rather the judgment that some thing else is more important than fear." - Ambrose Redmoon
3. Develop personal strategies to alleviate the anxiety and worry often involved in pregnancy and childbirth – for example: visualising how you would like the labour and delivery to proceed in your home; practicing yoga for pregnancy.

## *SYLDA, MARK AND BABY JONAH, FIRST TIME HOME BIRTHEE*

*"After a lovely calm and gentle labour, our son was born in the warmth and privacy of our home thanks to the wonderful support of our midwife. Being at home in familiar surroundings made the experience so comforting and safe. Having a midwife who we knew and had a relationship with made it all the more special. Just a couple of hours later our new family was tucked up together in our own bed...we couldn't imagine a more lovely way to bring our first baby into the world."*

## 20. BARBARA'S 2010 "PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION"

4. Find a supportive birth partner – this may be your significant other; however, if your partner feels they are unable to support you in your plan for a homebirth then find a reliable alternative. While massage and hands-on practical support are invaluable – an emotionally prepared, supportive birth partner will make an integral difference to your birthing experience.
5. Understand and trust your body – many women begin to falter in their trust that their body is more than capable of having a normal and incident-free delivery. It is beneficial to affirm regularly that a woman's body is perfectly built for pregnancy, labour and birth. In fact, people have been birthing at home for far longer than they have been birthing in hospital. While complications can emerge, emergencies are extremely rare.
6. Understand and trust the role of the midwives – the experience that the Community Midwives bring to the homebirth milieu is varied, extensive and professional. Trust that they are equipped to deal with a myriad of birthing situations and that they are there to support you fully in your homebirth experience.

*JANE AND JOHN,<sup>3</sup> HOME BIRTHS "John would joke that he was going to keep a cardboard cut out of each of the community midwives to produce when I am in a bad mood : it was a guaranteed way to have me on an endorphin high in seconds!"*



"I had my second and third home births with the Community Midwives. I could not have been more impressed with their professional yet personal approach to birth and midwifery. At all times I felt I was in the best possible hands. Everyone I have ever spoken to who has used the community midwives always has the same thing to say... 'They are angels. Absolutely incredible. Every single one of them.'

The experience of having your baby at home and then to slip into your own bed with your baby in your arms and your family constantly around you is Heaven! I recommend it unreservedly. And with the Community Midwives in your corner, you can not go wrong!"

**PATRIKA MANI 2ND AND 3RD HOME BIRTH**

*MARGARET, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE, "I love the closeness of a homebirth and the comradery that develops between the attending midwives, the women and her partner. I love to see the joy and sense of achievement that women experience after her birth."*

## 22. COUPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF THEIR HOMEBIRTH



"Some people say that nature takes over and you know what to do, for me my brain just went into neutral and I put it all in the hands of the midwives. I just followed their instructions and suggestions from beginning to end as I had complete confidence in them. I didn't really feel that I knew what to do, but I knew that they did! It makes sense to me that the more relaxed you are and the more comfortable with your surroundings the quicker and easier labour will be and that is certainly the way it worked for me having my babies at home." **SHANNON**



### MOLLY, FIRST TIME MUM'S EXPERIENCE AND ALSO

*PREGNANT NOW, "The reason I believe your home is the best place for you, you feel safe secure and free to do whatever you need to do with no disruptions from other labouring women, medical staff, bright lights, new environments. I feel being at home gives you the best opportunity to labour and birth your baby as nature intended."*

“I believe that birth is an extremely private experience where you are privileged to experience the birth of your child, no other place do you feel more comfortable than within your own home. For a father and husband, the most important role you play is providing full support to your wife while she goes through the experience of giving birth. Having the birth at home also allows me to remain with my wife and baby during the entire process, and more importantly following the birth where typically both the mother and baby remain in hospital. The moments following the birth are critical to the father and baby for bonding, within my own home I have this opportunity.”



**CRAIG WISE, FIRST TIME DAD'S EXPERIENCE**

**WHAT IF YOUR PARTNER IS WORRIED ABOUT HOMEBIRTH?**

We would encourage you to talk to other parents and the midwives who have planned homebirths. Voice your concerns. Discuss with your partner and make an informed decision.

**SYLDA, MARK AND BABY JONAH, FIRST TIME HOME BIRTHEE**

*“From the start of the pregnancy right through to the fantastic postnatal aftercare the Community Midwives provided a really personal, professional service and inspired confidence in this first time mum! If only every expecting mother was lucky enough to be in their care.”*



1. Active Birth: The New Approach to Giving Birth Naturally by Janet Balaskas
2. Spiritual Midwifery by Ina May Gaskin
3. Birthing from Within by Pam England
4. Birth Your Way by Sheila Kitzinger
5. Rediscovering Birth by Sheila Kitzinger
6. The Scientification of Love by Michel Odent
7. Birth without Violence
8. The Father's Homebirth Handbook, Leah Hazard



*JANE AND JOHN,<sup>3</sup> HOME BIRTHS“ People often talk about how scared they were bringing their baby home for the first time. We never felt that fear. It was lovely to have the older children involved. Check-ups were just a normal easy part of the lazy Saturday morning routine and they became expert with a fetal monitor.Home made chicken soup on the sofa with your favourite music playing and your midwife slugging you and everyone laughing and chatting easily and your 18 month old helping to give the baby his first wash in the kitchen sink.....”*



<a href="http://www.activebirthcentre.com">www.activebirthcentre.com</a>	Resource for active natural birth/birth pools
<a href="http://www.homebirth.ie">www.homebirth.ie</a>	An Irish voluntary group who give information and support to those considering and opting for homebirth
<a href="http://www.homebirth.org.uk">www.homebirth.org.uk</a>	UK based homebirth reference site which provide information and opinions about home birth
<a href="http://www.madeinwater.co.uk">www.madeinwater.co.uk</a>	Home of le basstinne pool
<a href="http://www.birthingmamas.ie">www.birthingmamas.ie</a>	Site which sells pools and can arrange free pick up in Dublin
<a href="http://www.borninwater.co.uk">www.borninwater.co.uk</a>	Very practical information on home births and also online shops
<a href="http://www.thegoodbirth.co.uk">www.thegoodbirth.co.uk</a>	Lots of articles on the website, and plenty of guidance on choosing a pool
<a href="http://www.birthpoolinbox.co.uk">www.birthpoolinbox.co.uk</a>	Interesting website

*MOLLY, FIRST TIME MUM'S EXPERIENCE AND ALSO*

*PREGNANT NOW* "My body has spent 9 months growing my baby, it knows how to finish the job. Animals in the wild give birth when things are quiet and calm and they are in their own safe environment with no disturbances, however if something should disturb them or unsettle them, labour will stop until they feel safe again. Thus the reason I believe your home is the best place for you, you feel safe secure and free to do whatever you need to do."

1. National Maternity Hospital annual reports 1998 - 2011.
2. Enkin M Keirse MJNC, Chalmers. A guide to effective Care in pregnancy and childbirth: third edition. Oxford: University Press 2000
3. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and Royal college of midwives. Joint Statement No.2 April 2007 [www.rcog.org.uk/index](http://www.rcog.org.uk/index)



UNA, HOMEBIRTH "Looking back on my homebirth experience it struck me that the huge difference was in how I never went to a place in my head of thinking am I able to do this or not....when do I need to go to the hospital, have I reached the stage when I need to get into the hospital for help, staying in my head and judging where I was at .....instead I was in the comfort of my own home, and I knew I had the mid wives on hand for when I needed them - I didn;t have to move - or change - I could progress without thinking where was I at.... "

*It's not the birth place that makes your birth memorable or powerful it is what you and your partner bring to it!*



# Homebirth