



# Overview

## Women's Health Overview

### Should I use a Doula?

The use of doulas is becoming more popular and frequent. A doula is trained in childbirth and provides emotional, physical and educational support to someone who is pregnant, experiencing labor or has recently given birth. The mutual goals of the doula and birthing person are to have a safe, memorable and empowering birthing experience.

#### What is the training and role of the doula?

There is no legal training requirement for doulas, unlike doctors and certified nurse midwives, who have several years of advanced medical training. Most doulas have completed certification programs requiring approximately 30 hours of classes. A doula does not provide clinical care. She acts as an advocate and friend in the birthing process, often starting the relationship with the pregnant person long before labor begins.

#### What can a doula do?

In the prenatal period, a doula can educate patients, assist in developing a birth plan, address fears, reduce stress, and help their clients better understand the procedures and possible

complications in late pregnancy or delivery. During labor and birth, a doula may help with verbal encouragement, warm baths and pain relief, including breathing, relaxation, massage, aromatherapy and laboring positions. Doulas also encourage participation from the partner and offer reassurance. After birth, doulas will help new mothers with breastfeeding and encourage bonding between the new baby and other family members.

#### What about the role of the partner when using a doula?

The role of the doula is not to replace husbands or partners in labor. Having a doula allows the patient's partner to support the patient emotionally during labor and birth and to enjoy the experience. Plus, a doula can help when the partner needs a break for food or sleep.

#### Are doulas only helpful if planning an unmedicated birth?

The presence of a doula can be helpful despite the type of birth planned. Although women who are cared for

see [Should I use a Doula?](#) pg. 4

### What is the Medical Evidence on Doulas?

A 2017 Cochrane Review of 26 medical studies documenting the benefits of having a doula present during labor found that women who had continuous support during labor:

- Were **39% less likely** to have a cesarean section
- Were **15% more likely** to deliver their baby without a vacuum extractor or forceps
- Were **10% less likely** to use any medications for pain relief
- Had **shorter labors by 41 minutes** on average
- Were **more likely to be satisfied** with the birth experience
- Had **newborns less likely to have poor vital signs** at five minutes after birth



# From the Chairman

In this edition of our newsletter, we focus on obstetrics. While the move to delivery in a hospital is a relatively recent phenomenon for humanity, it was associated with an overall decrease in maternal and neonatal mortality. As with all things in life, birthing people paid a price. Technological advances sometimes conflicted with the natural process of birth.

During the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic, there was a surge in home births. Some were done because patients were frightened of being exposed to the virus. Still, many wished to give birth in a more supportive environment.

Because of COVID-19, many hospitals significantly restricted visitation in labor and patients were deprived of additional support persons. One group of these support persons was doulas. Designed to be an additional support person and patient advocate, these persons were ultimately allowed in many hospitals in addition to the patient's partner. Many cultures in the developing world use traditional birth attendants instead of physicians or midwives, indicating the importance of a supportive environment to give birth. Doulas are discussed in more detail in this newsletter.

Finally, we are pleased to announce our biennial "**Breastfeeding: Baby's Natural Choice Conference.**" This is a place to meet other breastfeeding experts, learn new approaches and techniques and understand a bit of the science as well. Even more exciting is to be able to host this conference in person. Please join us if you can.

## overview

### Women's Health Overview

newsletter is published quarterly for health care professionals and the general public with special interest in women's health issues by the Olson Center for Women's Health.

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Carl V. Smith, MD, FACOG

Chairman

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

College of Medicine

University of Nebraska Medical Center

A photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light-colored sweater, holding a young child with curly hair. The child is resting their head on the woman's shoulder. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting. Overlaid on the top left of the image are several diagonal lines in shades of teal and yellow.

# research news

## Research on Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding gives infants essential calories and nutrients for the best growth, health and development. Breastfeeding benefits both mother and her infant and allows them to bond. Research supplies a great deal of information on the social and cultural impacts of breastfeeding.

A study supported by the National Institutes of Health suggests that depression persisting after pregnancy and reduced breastfeeding rates or durations may partially account for the increased risk for infant developmental delays. Researchers know that children born to mothers who have depression during pregnancy are at risk for developmental delays but have not known why. The researchers analyzed questionnaire data and medical records from 3,450 children and their mothers. They measured gestational age (the week of pregnancy when a child was born), whether maternal depression continued after birth and breastfeeding history. Their results show that children of mothers with depression during pregnancy were more likely to have developmental delays if their mothers had more symptoms of depression after pregnancy and if they breastfed

for a shorter time. The findings also show that a child's gestational age did not increase the risk of developmental delay. Based on their results, researchers conclude that physicians may be able to reduce the risk of developmental delays by offering treatment for depression both during and after pregnancy and by counseling new mothers on how to breastfeed successfully.

Research offers insight into the nutritional components and benefits of breastfeeding and breast milk. Human milk is complex, having hundreds of ingredients that vary from mother to mother and change over time according to the baby's needs. Two recent studies show that components of breast milk not easily digested by the infant's gut surprisingly help provide the infant with essential nutrients. The studies found that poorly digestible compounds like urea, a waste product of protein digestion, and complex sugars foster the growth of beneficial bacteria in the infant's gut, which provide the infant with essential nutrients. Another investigation found that specific fatty acid nutrients in the milk of female mice activated processes that trigger

the maturation of heart muscle cells (cardiomyocytes) in the infant's heart. Note: This study focused on mice only, and there is no information about whether fatty acids in human milk and formula are similarly essential for newborn heart function or maturation.

Feeding a baby breast milk offers protection against common childhood infections and reduces the risk of developing other diseases, including asthma, obesity and diabetes. A priority for future research is to learn more about the composition of human milk and how breastfeeding affects child development and future disease susceptibility. Enhanced knowledge of human milk composition calls attention to the possibility that newly found biologically active substances in human milk could potentially be added to infant formula to improve child health in those infants that are not or cannot be breastfed.

For more information on the benefits of breastfeeding, and the factors that affect breastfeeding, plan to attend the upcoming **"Breastfeeding: Baby's Natural Choice Conference"** (see page 5).

Contributed by John S. Davis, PhD  
UNMC Department of OB-GYN

Should I Use a Doula? [continued from pg. 1](#)

by doulas need less intervention, the doula's primary role is to help women have a safe, memorable and empowering birth experience. The doula can still provide emotional, informational and physical support through labor for those who desire or need a birth with more intervention or medication. For those needing a cesarean, a doula can provide constant support and encouragement even during the procedure itself. This can free the partner to be with the baby and go to the nursery if there are complications.

### Finding a doula:

There are several doulas in Omaha and other areas of Nebraska. It is best to choose a doula with whom the birthing family is comfortable. Charges for doula services vary. There are also organizations available to help with the cost of a doula if certain criteria are met. You can find these below. Contact your health care provider or local hospital if you have any questions about doulas.

- I Be Black Girl [www.ibebblackgirl.com](http://www.ibebblackgirl.com)
- Omaha Better Birth Project [www.omahabetterbirth.org/doula-grants](http://www.omahabetterbirth.org/doula-grants)
- Omaha Black Doula Association [www.omahablackdoulaassociation.org](http://www.omahablackdoulaassociation.org)
- Nebraska Medicaid - Nebraska Total Care - offers pregnancy guidance and support from certified doulas for members who qualify. Follow up with Nebraska Total Care to determine coverage
- Nebraska Medicaid - United Healthcare Community/UHC - Nebraska Medicine - UHC has a doula grant initiative, available to those that identify as a Black woman, receive care from Nebraska Medicine and have UHC coverage. Please discuss this with your provider or clinic social worker if interested

Contributed by **Heather Ramsey, DNP, FACNM** and **Jessica McGhee, RN, BSN**  
*Olson Center for Women's Health at Nebraska Medicine*



**OLSON CENTER  
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH**

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Olson Center for Women's Health is to provide a national comprehensive health science center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). Based in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the center enables UNMC to make distinctive strides in education, research and service through innovative approaches to women's health issues.

### Want More Information?

Visit our website: **OlsonCenter.com**

Learn more about our health care providers, services and programs available at the Olson Center for Women's Health. Our website also offers women's health information. Here are a few topics:

- Breastfeeding
- Breast health and disease
- Cardiovascular health
- Gastrointestinal health
- Gynecologic health
- Incontinence
- Reproductive endocrinology/infertility
- Pregnancy
- Wellness

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## Save the Date

26<sup>th</sup> Annual

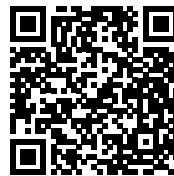


Omaha  
*Women's*  
Health & Wellness  
Conference

*Radiant Vitality: Celebrating Wellness  
Through Life's Different Stages*

Friday, Oct. 6, 2023  
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

La Vista Conference Center  
12520 Westport Parkway  
La Vista, NE



Scan this code for more in-  
formation or call the Olson  
Center for Women's Health at  
402.559.6345.



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In support of improving patient care, this activity has been planned and implemented by University of Nebraska Medical Center and the Olson Center for Women's Health. University of Nebraska Medical Center is jointly accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), to provide continuing education for the healthcare team.

This accredited continuing educational activity is designed for community members, nurses, social workers, and other interested health care professionals. Continuing education credit will be provided.



# 15<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL BREASTFEEDING: BABY'S NATURAL CHOICE CONFERENCE

**Wednesday,  
August 30, 2023**

7:15 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
La Vista Conference Center  
La Vista, Nebraska

## Registration Fee

\$125 for general registration  
\$50 for students with full-time  
verification

*Includes breakfast, lunch  
and CE credit*

Registration is  
**OPEN!**



Scan this code  
to register or call  
402.559.5929;  
877.832.6924

## Keynote Speakers

Katrina Mitchell, MD, IBCLC, PMH-C (Sansum Clinic, Santa Barbara, CA)  
Kristen Choi, PhD, RN, FAAN (UCLA, Los Angeles)

## Audience

Health care providers, physician assistants, residents and students, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, nurses, registered dietitians and social workers.

## Featured Topics

Treating mastitis  
Breastfeeding and trauma informed care  
Physical therapy interventions  
Maternal depression  
Bariatric surgery care: prenatal and postnatal  
Challenges with tongue tie

## Exhibits

If you would like to exhibit at the conference, please email Rachel Slowik at [rslowik@unmc.edu](mailto:rslowik@unmc.edu)

## Conference Sponsors

Olson Center for Women's Health, UNMC College of Medicine Center for Continuing Education, and UNMC College of Nursing Continuing interProfessional Development and Innovation (CiPDI)

## Questions?

Call the Olson Center for Women's Health at 402.559.6345

*Registrations must be received no later than **Mon., Aug. 21, 2023***



## OLSON CENTER FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

[olsoncenter.com](http://olsoncenter.com)

## Olson Center Webinar Series:

Every quarter, the Olson Center offers an online webinar for nurses with continuing education at no cost. Even though the webinars are designed for nurses, anyone is welcome to attend. If you missed the live lectures, you can still view them.

**Previous topics available are:** melatonin physiology, function and OTC use; abnormal uterine bleeding; the placenta (how it works, what can go wrong, and using nanomedicines); and compassion fatigue.



**Coming up on August 8**, will be the next live webinar on bone health with a discussion on exercise research and osteoporosis medication pharmacology.

**To view the webinars**, or learn about upcoming webinars, go to: [www.unmc.edu/obgyn/community](http://www.unmc.edu/obgyn/community) and click on 'webinars'.

While on our website, take some time to view other offerings under the tabs: Brown Bag Lectures; Wellness Through Doing Hobby Series; Women's Health Week; and our past breastfeeding and women's conferences.

Questions? Call 402.559.6345.

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Registration Now  
Open!

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