



HAVING BABIES: THE UK WAY

MARCH 19, 2008

When I first moved to London nearly 5 years ago, I had no idea what a midwife was. I had heard the term before, but had some old-fashioned vision of hippies and candles. The thought of having a baby without ever seeing a doctor was completely foreign (and freaky) to me. I thought that surely a midwife could not be as knowledgeable as a doctor.

Here in the UK, if you are sick, you see a doctor, if you're pregnant, you see a midwife. Midwives have been delivering babies for ages and ages, and doctors are only involved if there is a complication or a medical reason for them. Because of this, it happens that midwives in the UK tend to be more experienced than doctors in the field of childbirth.

I was assured of all of this when I got pregnant for the first time, but being an American I was still not entirely convinced. However, five years (and two babies) later, I am a huge advocate of midwife-led pregnancies/deliveries!

Because I had two uncomplicated pregnancies, both of my babies were delivered by a midwife. I spent a total of 19 months being pregnant and never saw a doctor (unless you count the ultrasound scans). I found the whole process to be much less medical, much less invasive and much more natural than I had always imagined it to be. During my pregnancies, my midwife was more concerned with how I was feeling (physically and emotionally) than whether my urine results were slightly above the norm, etc.

Don't get me wrong - I received all the necessary tests, but it wasn't as much of a focus as it seems to be in the States. Being a low-stress kind of girl, this system really worked well for me.

Another big difference between the U.S. and the U.K. is the amount of time you stay in the hospital after the baby is born. After both births, I stayed no longer than 12 hours in the hospital. In fact, after my second birth, I only stayed the minimum 6 hours. Hospital care (for straight-forward deliveries and healthy babies) is less important here in the UK because they offer home visits by a midwife for the first week post-delivery. A midwife comes to your home to check on you and the baby, weigh him, help with breastfeeding, etc. Doesn't it sound lovely? You don't have to leave your house - they come to you! And you can share a cup of tea, stay in your pjs, and be cozy in your own home.

I really loved having a midwife guide me through my pregnancies. But I should probably clarify that I paid for a private midwife (rather than going through the NHS), so I had the lovely experience of really getting to know my midwife. If you go through the NHS, you are treated by numerous midwives, and are never assured that you will even know the midwife who delivers your baby. So I can imagine that this midwife-led system might not have been as enjoyable for other mums in the UK.

*Of course, if you live in the U.K. and really *want* a doctor, you can always 'go private' and dish out the £s! (A private doctor costs on average £10,000!)

-Courtney

Category: [Baby](#), [Having Babies](#), [Health & Care](#), [London](#)

COURTNEY IN LONDON | 12 COMMENTS
