

Ask the DOULA

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Expert birthing advice from someone who knows

DON'T TAKE IT LYING DOWN

I'm birthing in a hospital, but I don't want to have to be on my back in bed. What are my options?

It sounds like you already know the benefits of freedom of movement in labor and birth. Standing up, for example, allows gravity to help put the baby's head on your cervix. Research continues to show that restricting women's movement during labor may result in worse birth outcomes.

Because each facility has different rules, the hospital where you plan to deliver will have the best answers for you. Women often talk with their doctors or midwives about these concerns, but neglect to find out what's allowed once they're checked in. If the hospital supports it, your doula can teach you to reposition the hospital bed so you can squat and hold the top of the bed or be on all fours. You may also be able to bring along inflatable fitness balls for you and your partner to use for labor support.

But don't wait until labor begins to find out whether freedom of movement will be possible for you. It is one of the most medically valid questions you can discuss ahead of time. Although media images portray laboring women in bed, active birth positions make contractions more efficient and shorten labor, as well as provide greater comfort and less chance of intervention.

NIGHT SHIFT

I'm having trouble staying asleep. What can I do?

Have you considered that your interrupted sleep could be preparing you to meet your baby's needs? Human babies are dependent creatures who need lots of attention, often in the middle of the night, which seems to me a valid enough reason for pregnancy's strange sleep patterns, especially in the third trimester. According to yogic thought, the early morning—between 2 and 5 a.m.—is



when the separations between mother and fetus are thinnest.

If you look at your sleep difficulties like this, they transform from a frustration into an opportunity. Rather than fight your body's need to be awake, embrace the space to connect with your growing baby. Take a bath, color, journal, or write positive thoughts for your labor and first few weeks as a new parent. You can even try meditative, contemplative household tasks such as sweeping the floor.

Of course, you'll need to set up your schedule so you can nap or rest in the afternoon. Ask your boss about altering your workday so you can take a break between 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. Tell your partner you'll need this quiet time on the weekends, too. Try using a pregnancy relaxation audio CD like my *Prenatal Peace & Calming* (\$13, cdbaby.com/jillwodnick) to generate deeper levels of rest—it works well in your parked car or an office "nap room." ☺

Find out before labor begins whether freedom of movement will be possible.

JUST ASK

Got a question for our expert doula? Email it to editors@pregnancymagazine.com, or write *Pregnancy Q&A*, 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080