

Pregnancy and Birth



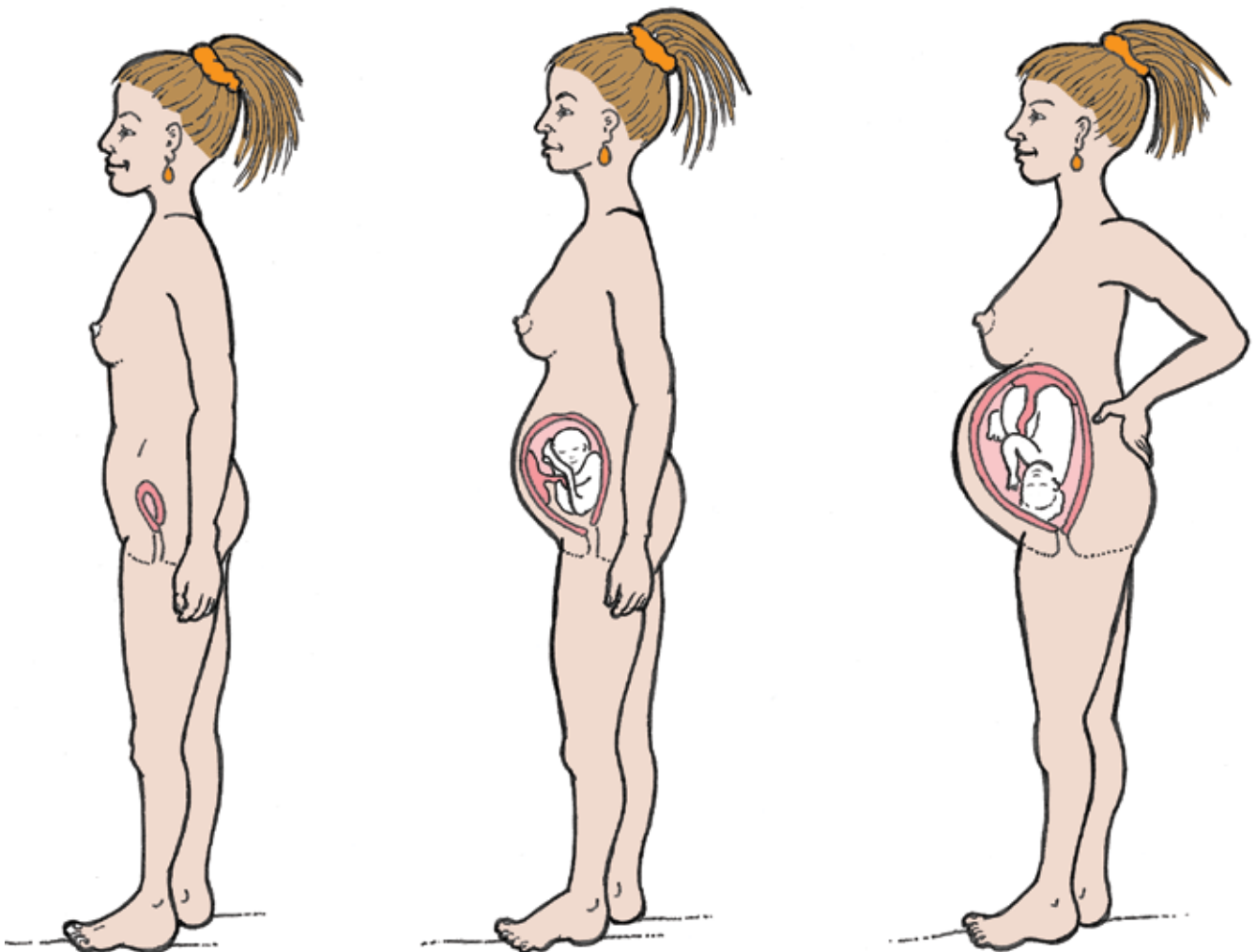
When a woman is growing a baby in her uterus, we say she is pregnant.

What happens when a woman is pregnant?

The baby grows for 9 months in a bag of water inside the uterus. The uterus is below the stomach. The water in the bag helps to stop the baby from getting bumped while it is growing.

The baby needs good food to grow. It gets its food from the mother's blood through a tube called the umbilical cord. This tube is connected to a sac called the placenta on the side of the mother's uterus. The tube goes from the mother's uterus to the baby's belly button.

As the baby grows, the uterus stretches so the baby will fit. This does not hurt the mother. During the 9 months of pregnancy her belly will grow bigger and bigger. Her breasts will also grow during this time and sometimes they will be sore.



Staying healthy during pregnancy

When a woman is pregnant, it is very important for her to look after her health. This will help the baby to be strong and healthy.

It is best if women do not smoke cigarettes or drink wine, beer or any other alcohol when they are pregnant. This can be harmful to the baby.

It is also best not to drink too much coffee or other things that have caffeine in them. These include coke and tea. A woman should not take any medicines or tablets unless the doctor says they are OK for the baby. If a woman is taking any medicine when she is pregnant, she should talk to her doctor about whether the medicine is OK for the baby.

Pregnant women need to stay healthy so they should eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as fresh fish, chicken, eggs or meat. They should also eat cheese (but only hard cheeses), yoghurt and drink milk. It is also very good to drink water. Pregnant women should make sure they drink plenty of fluids.

There are some foods that a woman should not eat when she is pregnant. These are soft cheeses, some uncooked meats, shellfish and some other foods. A woman should talk to her doctor about which foods are best to eat when she is pregnant.

Women should take folate tablets for the first 3 months of the pregnancy. Folate helps to protect the baby from some health problems. A woman can buy these folate tablets from a chemist, supermarket or health food shop.

Some women feel sick during pregnancy

During the first 3 months of pregnancy some women feel sick. They may vomit. This is called morning sickness. After the first 3 months are over, the morning sickness usually goes away. If a woman gets sick, she should ask a doctor what to do to make her feel better.

Some women have different feelings when pregnant

Sometimes a woman's feelings are very different when she is pregnant. She may feel very happy or calm, or feel like crying or being angry at different times. Women should talk to a doctor if they feel very sad or angry.

Getting regular check-ups

It is very important that a pregnant woman goes to her doctor every month for a check-up. Some women see a nurse called a midwife for their check-ups. The doctor or midwife will check that the woman and her baby are both healthy. They will answer any questions the woman has about her pregnancy.

The check-ups usually include a blood test, ultrasound and some other tests. An ultrasound is a test that shows a picture of the baby inside the woman's belly. The ultrasound is done to make sure the baby is growing well.



Women can also get help and advice by going to a class with other pregnant women, or by talking to women friends who have had children.

The birth

After 9 months, the baby will be ready to come out of the woman's body. The muscles in the uterus push the baby down out of the woman's vagina. This is called labour. During labour, the muscles work harder and harder and give the woman cramps, which are called contractions. When the contractions start, the woman should ring the doctor and go to the hospital. It means the baby is coming.

The vagina stretches or opens so the baby can be born. Usually the baby's head comes out first. After the birth, the baby starts to breathe by his or herself and the doctor or nurse can cut the tube that has joined the baby to the mother. This does not hurt the woman or the baby. Soon after the baby is born the sac from the side of the mother's uterus comes out of the vagina too. This means the birth is over. The woman will feel very tired after the baby is born.

Some babies take a long time to be born and others take a short time. Some women feel a lot of pain with the contractions and some do not. If a woman has a lot of pain, the doctor can give her some medicines to help.

It is different for every woman, although many feel excited and happy as their baby is born.

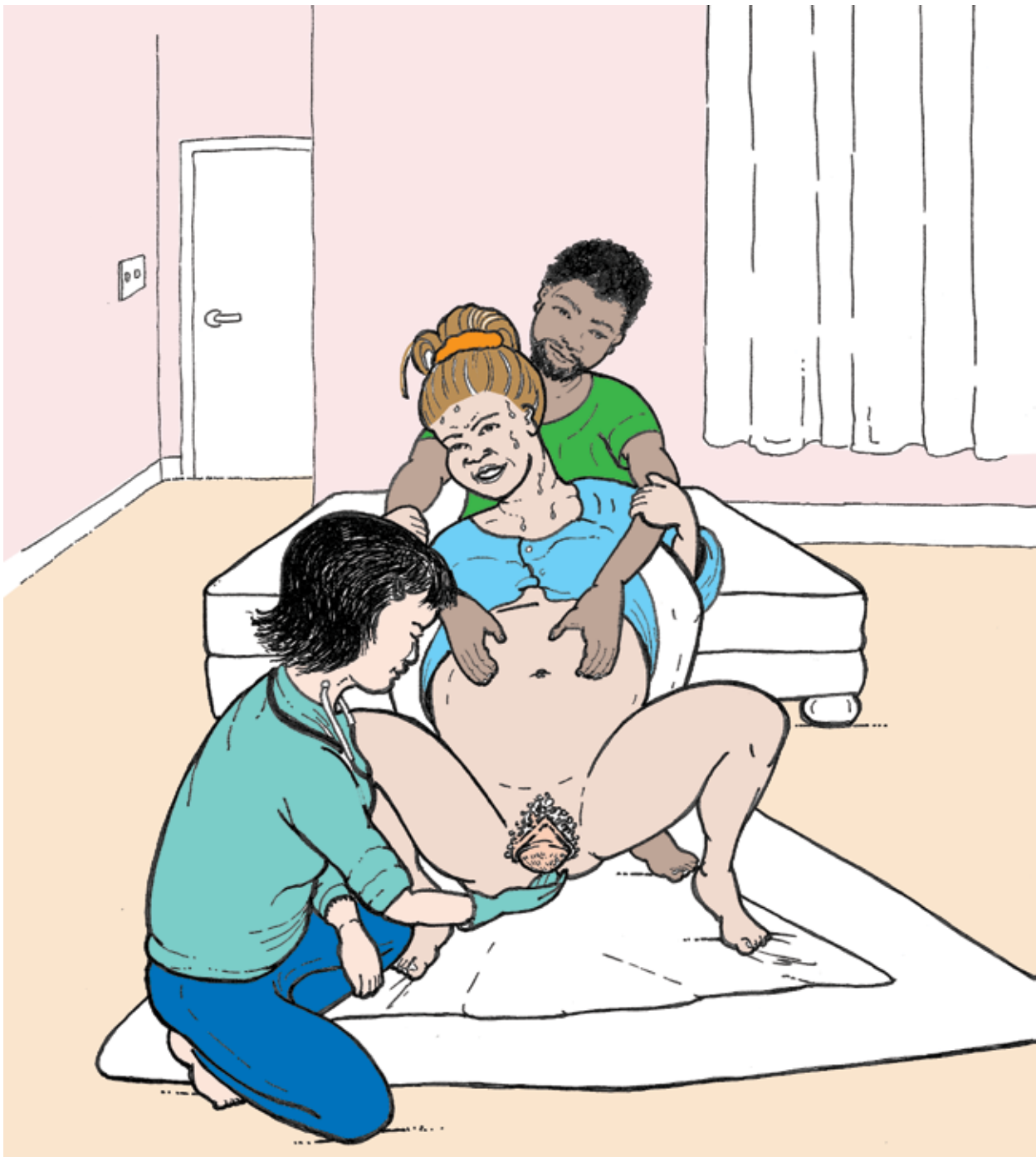


Caesarean birth

If the doctor thinks that a birth is going to be too hard for the mother or baby, they will do an operation to cut the skin on her belly through to the uterus and take the baby out. This is called a Caesarean birth. The woman is given some medicine so that it does not hurt.

A woman can have a friend or partner to support her at the birth

Women need help to have a baby. A woman might like to have the father of the baby or a friend or partner with her too. It is the woman's choice who she wants to have with her at the birth.



Feeding the baby

Soon after the baby is born the woman's breasts fill up with milk for the baby. Some women feed their baby with this breast milk. The baby drinks the breast milk by sucking on the mother's nipple. This is called breast-feeding.



Other women feed their baby with a bottle. Some women put milk from their breasts in the bottle and others put a type of milk called baby formula in the bottle for the baby to drink.

If the baby is fed from a bottle, the baby drinks the milk by sucking on the teat at the end of the bottle. A teat is made of a type of plastic with a hole in it that is designed for babies to suck on.



It is best for a woman to breast-feed her baby if she can. This is because breast milk has everything the baby needs to grow and helps the baby to be healthy. Some women find it difficult to breast-feed their baby. A woman can ask a nurse or a doctor to show her how to get the baby to suck milk from her nipple.

Some women are not able to breast-feed their baby or decide that they don't want to. It is OK for a woman to bottle-feed her baby.

There is a book called 'Having a Baby' that a woman can read on the NSW Health website to get more information about pregnancy. The website is listed in the fact sheet called 'Where to go for help or advice'.



What you need to know:

- When a woman is pregnant, she needs to eat lots of healthy food and drink plenty of fluids to look after the baby that is growing inside of her
- A woman should not smoke or drink alcohol when she is pregnant
- A woman should try not to have too many drinks that contain caffeine when she is pregnant
- A woman should talk to her doctor about taking folate tablets for the first 3 months of her pregnancy
- A woman should go to the doctor every month when she is pregnant to make sure the baby is growing properly inside her
- A woman can also have someone like a family member or the baby's father or a friend come with her to the hospital to help her while the baby is being born

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