



## **Hospital Births: Losing the Fear Factor**

What do women typically feel walking into the delivery room? Sure, they know it's going to be one of the most exciting events of their lives, but in a busy hospital, some doctors deliver six or seven babies in a single day – and the last thing a new mom wants is to feel like she's waiting in line at Starbuck's for a baby and a frappuccino to go.

Like all women expecting their first baby, Amilia Griffith of Boulder, CO, didn't know how to anticipate the experience. She'd always been an organizer and a planner, and did everything possible to be ready for the big day: from birthing classes and hospital tours to practice drives with her husband. She bookmarked every web site she could find that offered advice: What to pack. What to wear. How to breathe. But the big question still lingered—when it came to the actual birth itself, how would she handle it?

No matter how prepared a woman is, hospital births come with a high I.F. (Intimidation Factor). From the beeping machines and rubber gloves to the polite but often officious staff; much of the hospital experience communicates one message to the mommy-to-be: *You are not in charge here.*

In Griffith's case, that lack of control was made most obvious in what she was given to wear.

Griffith had packed a special birth skirt and top, both specifically made to accommodate her needs, the staff's needs, and the possible medical equipment. Something she knew she would feel comfortable in and, most of all, more like herself.

But when the big day came, Griffith found herself standing in her hospital room staring at her own reflection—wearing a traditional hospital gown. Her special clothes were folded up in her bag.

“As soon as we checked in and got settled, the nurse gave me the gown, and told me to change.” Did she let the nurse know she had something of her own to wear? “No,” Griffith shakes her head. “I don't know why, but I put on the gown they gave me without saying a thing. It was uncomfortable and definitely undignified—the exact opposite of how I hoped I'd feel on such an important day.

“I stood there in the gown and waited for the nurse to come back, not sure how to tell her I hated it. I felt awkward and so out of my element. I had no idea I would be so shy about making requests when the time finally came.”

So when the nurse returned, Griffith mustered her strength and did what many women don't realize they can do: she made a request.

Instant relief: the nurse told Griffith her special birth skirt and top would be just fine. “Not only was the nurse fine with my both the top and the skirt, she thought they were totally cute when I showed them to



her,” she laughs. “And then the doctor came in and agreed that they would be perfectly fine in the delivery room. That’s when I not only felt better, I felt capable and ready to have a baby.”

In truth, most hospitals actually allow patients to wear whatever they want. In fact, these facilities typically prefer to give women the freedom to shape their own birthing environment as much as possible, with special music, scented oils, or personal keepsakes set at the mother’s eye level.

But you have to ask. And that can take a little unexpected courage from even the most forthright of mommies.

So why don’t women feel comfortable enough to ask for what they want in the delivery room? Experts cite that the root cause is intimidation factor, evoked by the environment itself. “Hospitals are well-equipped for anything unexpected, and there’s a sense of professionalism and safety there. But there’s also the added challenge of women being expected to do something extraordinarily difficult in an environment that isn’t their own,” explains Carri Grimditch, a certified doula in Boulder and creator of Binsi labor and birth apparel.

According to Grimditch, many women feel like they’re actually imposing on the hospital staff while they’re there. “Maybe it’s because we all know birth is messy,” she explains. “It’s not uncommon for many women to actually feel like they’re intruding. It’s the same fear we have of being a guest in someone’s house, and spilling a drink on their carpet.”

The truth is, most doctors and nurses welcome requests from the mother. “Most physicians I’ve worked with understand that when the mother feels comfortable and confident, her body will carry less tension, which can lessen complications during labor,” Grimditch affirms. “Your birthing staff wants what you want – the easiest birth possible.”

And if the staff doesn’t always seem receptive to requests, Grimditch explains that it’s no one’s fault. “Nurses who deal with patients all day, do tend to fall into a bit of a routine: ‘Welcome to your room, let’s get you checked in, here’s your gown.’”

Plus, there’s that fear factor that continues to rear its head: “The hospital itself can be an intimidating environment anyway. You’re surrounded by doctors, nurses, and experts who make you think they know more about birth than you do because they experience birth in a hospital setting on a daily basis. So it becomes easy to avoid asking questions or making requests.”

The solution for women is simple. “Remember that ultimately, you’re the one doing the hard work. Bring what you need, make the requests that are important to you. No matter how many women may be giving birth at a given hospital,” Grimditch points out, “every single birth is the most important one of the day.”