

A Book for Midwives

Care for pregnancy, birth,
and women's health

**Susan Klein, Suellen Miller,
and Fiona Thomson**



Oakland, California, USA



Published by:
Hesperian Health Guides
2860 Telegraph Avenue Oakland,
California 94609 USA
www.hesperian.org

Copyright © 2004 by Hesperian Health Guides

Updated Ninth printing: July 2026

ISBN: 978-0-942364-23-1

Hesperian encourages you to copy, reproduce, or adapt any or all parts of this book, including the illustrations, provided that you do this for non-commercial purposes, credit Hesperian, and follow the other requirements of **Hesperian's Open Copyright Policy** (see hesperian.org/open-copyright-policy).

For certain kinds of adaptation and distribution, we ask that you first obtain permission from Hesperian. Contact permissions@hesperian.org to use any part of this book for commercial purposes; in quantities more than 100 print copies; in any digital format; or with an organizational budget more than US\$1 million.

We also ask that you contact Hesperian for permission **before beginning any translation**, to avoid duplication of efforts, and for suggestions about adapting the information in this book. Please send Hesperian a copy of any materials in which text or illustrations from this book have been used.

THIS BOOK CAN BE IMPROVED WITH YOUR HELP.

If you are a community health worker, doctor, parent, or anyone with ideas or suggestions for ways this book could be changed

to better meet the needs of your community, please write to Hesperian at the above address or email us at hesperian@hesperian.org. Thank you for your help.

This book has been printed in the USA by EPAC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Library of Congress has already cataloged the 10-digit ISBN as follows:

Klein, Susan, b. 1948.

A book for midwives : care for pregnancy, birth, and women's health / by Susan Klein, Suellen Miller, and Fiona Thomson.— 1st ed.

p. ; cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-942364-23-6 (pbk.)

1. Midwifery. 2. Midwives. 3. Pregnancy. 4. Childbirth. 5. Women--Health and hygiene.

I. Miller, Suellen, 1947- II. Thomson, Fiona, 1974- III. Hesperian Foundation. IV. Title.

[DNLM: 1. Midwifery. WQ 165 K635b 2004]

RG960.K56 2004

618.2--dc22

2004060651

Credits

Project coordination: Fiona Thomson

Design and production: Sarah Wallis

Cover design: Sarah Wallis

Additional writing and editing:

Darlana David, Zena Herman, Todd Jailer,
Jane Maxwell, Susan McCallister, Sarah
Shannon, Kathleen Vickery, Sarah Wallis

Art coordination: Fiona Thomson
and Sarah Wallis

Additional production: Lora Santiago

Artists: Namrata Bali, Jennifer Barrios,
Sara Boore, Heidi Broner,
May Florence Cadiente, Barbara Carter,
Gil Corral, Elizabeth Cox,
Regina Faul-Doyle, Christine Eber,
Iñaki Fernández de Retana, Sandy Frank,
Deborah Green, Susie Gunn, Jesse Hamm,
Haris Ichwan, Rosemary Jason, Anna Kallis,
Delphine Kenze, Susan Klein,
Joyce Knezevich, Gina Lee, June Mehra,
Naoko Miyamoto, Jeanne Muller,
Mabel Negrete, Gabriela Núñez,
Kate Peatman, Sara Reilly-Baldeschwieler,
Diana Reiss-Koncar, Petra Röhr-Rouendaal,
Leilani Roosman, Lucy Sargeant,
Mona Sfeir, Akiko Aoyagi Shurtleff,
Chengyu Song, Kathleen Tandy,
Fiona Thomson, Dovile Tomkute-
Veleckiene, Sarah Wallis, Lihua Wang,
David Werner, Christine Wong,
Allan Woong, Mary Ann Zapalac

Field-testing and networking: Starr Amrit

Copy editing: Rachel Markowitz

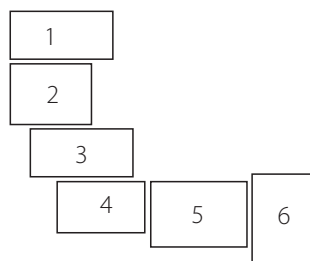
Indexing: Ty Koontz

Proofreading: Sunah Cherwin

Medical review: Ellen Israel, Lisa Keller, Melissa
Smith, Judith Standley

Editorial and production management:
Susan McCallister

Cover photographs:



1. *India* by Starr Amrit
 2. *Nepal* by Curt Carnemark/World Bank
 3. *Mexico* by Rick Maiman/David and
Lucile Packard Foundation, courtesy of
Photoshare
 4. *Democratic Republic of Congo* by
Gilberte Vansintejan
 5. *Tunisia* by Curt Carnemark/World Bank
 6. *Burma (Myanmar)* by Peter Williams/WCC
- Back cover: *Mexico* by Rick Maiman/
David and Lucile Packard Foundation,
courtesy of Photoshare

The first edition of this book was imagined, written, and illustrated by Susan Klein. Sadly, she died before it was published. This revision still rests on her writing, her drawings, and we hope, her vision — that *A Book For Midwives* would be a tool enabling all those who attend women in childbirth, regardless of their educational background, to exercise independent judgment and to make the best possible decisions at each birth.

Credits for the 2009, 2013, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2024, and 2026 updates: This updated, corrected printing relies heavily on the generously offered, wise counsel of midwives Ellen Israel, Ellen Lapowsky, Suellen Miller, Judith Standley, and Sarah Wallis; and Drs. Reuben Granich, Lisa Keller, Scott Oesterling, Naman Shah, Linda Spangler, Amy Stenson, and Lorna Thornton. Editorial and design work by Dani Behonick, Shu Ping Guan, Todd Jailer, Jane Maxwell, Susan McCallister, Kathleen Tandy, Dorothy Tegeler, Fiona Thomson, and Paula Worby. The 2026 update was coordinated by Dani Behonick with support from Luis Aspeitia, Amy Hill, Rosemary Jason, and Naman Shah.

Thanks

Only with the collaboration of hundreds of advisors, reviewers, writers, artists, and others was it possible to create this book.

Every staff member, intern, and volunteer here at Hesperian Health Guides helped bring this book into the world, including those who raise funds, manage finances, publicize our books, and pack and ship them around the world. Outside our office, dozens of reviewers helped decide what this book should cover and how to do it. Groups of midwives and midwifery students in 10 countries critiqued early versions to make it as useful, appropriate, and accurate as possible. Midwives, doctors, and other health workers, trainers, and specialists volunteered their time to ensure the accuracy and clarity of the material here.

Along with our tireless medical editors, we called on a few reviewers over and over again, and they deserve special mention here. Thank you Deborah Billings, Lisa de Avila, Ruth Kennedy, and Karen Strange.

The following organizations contributed time, resources, and critical thinking: Averting Maternal Death and Disability (AMDD) in the US; ASECSEA in Guatemala; The Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition; The Berkeley Midwives Study Group in the US; El Centro Para los Adolescentes de San Miguel de Allende (CASA) in Mexico; Centre For Rural Studies and Development in India; El Centro de Atención Integral de la Pareja in Mexico; The International Confederation of Midwives; The Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines; Inuulitsivak Maternity Center in Canada; Ipas in the US, Ghana, and Kenya; Ixmucane and Midwives for Midwives in Guatemala; Jamkhed Comprehensive Rural Health Program in India; Kampot Hospital Maternity Center in Cambodia; the Maryknoll Sisters and the VEMA training center of Tanzania; Pathfinder in Peru; and the Reproductive Health Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand, Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in South Africa.

Thanks to the following publishers who gave us permission to use drawings: Family Care International, from *Healthy Women, Healthy Mothers*; Freedom From Hunger; and Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific, from *Breaking the Silence! Plantations and Pesticides*.

Our deep gratitude goes to everyone who gave their time, thoughts, and knowledge so generously, both to the original edition of *A Book for Midwives* and to this revision. Your commitment to health for all is what brought this book into the world. Thank you:

Hilary Abell	Judith Bishop	Kristen Cashmore	Kyle Craven
Deel Afroze	Lisa Bohmer	Teresa Cerezo Gonzalez	Jane Crawley
Arthur Ammann	Bill Bower	Rebecca Chalker	Alice de la Gente
Jana Anderson	Jenny Bowers	Barbara Clifford	Maria de la Paz Puebla Alvear
Susan Anderson	Kate Bowland	Davida Coady	Barbara de Souza
Shoba Arole	Isabel Brabant	Rani Coelho	David de Leeuw
Leonor Bahena Erazo	Barbara Briggs-Letson	Timothy Coen	Kim Dickson-Tetteh
Alison Bastien	Sandy Buffington	Jeff Conant	Milka Dinev
Naomi Baumslag	Colin Bullough	Peggy Cook	France Donnay
Denise Bergez	Raquel Burgos Medina	Maureen Corbett	Peg Donovan
Erik Bergstrom	August Burns	Antonia Cordova Morales	Carol Downer-Chatham
Alan Berkman	Pauline Butcher	Maricruz Coronado	Jane Drake
Ginger Bhakti	Sarah Buttrey	Jennie Corr	J.T. Dunn
Deborah Bickel	Ana María Camarillo		

Edith Eddy	Nuriya Janss	Lauri Paolinetti	Michael Tan
Sylvia Estrada-Claudio	Christine Johnson	Bill Parer	Vijayalaxmi Taskar
Aryn Faur	Mary Johnson	Juana Payva	Joe Taylor
Susan Fawcus	Ralph Johnson	Nimal Perera	Petra ten Hoope-Bender
Juliet Fleischl	John Kadyk	Lucille Pilling de Lucena	Carol Thuman
Nina Frankel	Angela Kamara	Man Poon	Linda Tietjen
Carmen Frazier	Robert Keast	Jennifer Potts	Jan Tritten
Frances Ganges	Christie Keith	Paula Quigley	Greg Troll
Tracy Gary	Beverly Kerr	Sumana Reddy	Mina Tulugak
Marlene Gerber-Fried	Mary Kroeger	Mary Ann Reiger	Laura Turiano
Julie Gerk	Raven Lang	Marina Rodriguez Palma	Gilberte Vansintean
Zafarullah Gill	B.A. Laris	Judith Rogers	Elmar Vinh-Thomas
Ruth Goehle	Brian Linde	Lorraine Rothman	Donna Vivio
Lisa Gonzalves	Julie Litwin	Sabala and Kranti	Claire Von Mollendorf
Nadine Goodman	David Loeb	Shelly Sala	David Werner
Suzan Goodman	Roxane Lovell	Graciela Salvador-Davila	Sharon Wilconson
Kristen Graser	Ronnie Lovich	Jason Sanders	Judith Winkler
James Green	Deborah Maine	Shira Saperstein	Merrill Wolf
Sadja Greenwood	Lorraine Mann	Merrie Schaller	Juliana Yartley
Cindy Haag	Alan Margolis	Katherine Sear	Karen Zack
Barb Hammes	Margaret Marshall	John Sellors	Lisa Ziebel
Marcia Hansen	Alberto Martinez Polis	Katharine Shapiro	
Roxanne Henderson	Luyanda Mavuya	Lonny Shavelson	
Griselda Hernandez	Nicky May	Theresa Shaver	
Kathy Herschderfer	Junice Melgar	Mira Shiva	
Sarah Jane Holcombe	Jose Luis Mendoza	C. Sienkiewicz	
Diana Hoover	Elena Metcalf	Jael Silliman	
Nap Hosang	Laura Miranda	Irene Sotelo Alvarez	
Jennifer Houston	Iris Moore	Jennifer Stonier	
Mary Clare Hubert	Syema Muzaffar	Susan Sykes	
Kathleen Huggins	Papa Djibril Niang		
Pamela Hunt	Sandy Niemann		
Robert Hurst	Besem Obenson		
Peter Ivey	Deborah Ottenheimer		



Additionally, the incredible patience and support of our families and friends during the long process of producing this book allowed us to see the project through.

Finally, thank you so much to the individuals and foundations who financially supported this project: Allan S. Gordon Foundation; Anna Lalor Burdick Program of the Lalor Foundation, Inc.; Averting Maternal Death and Disability Program, Heilbrunn Center, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University; Compton Foundation, Inc.; Conservation, Food and Health Foundation, Inc.; David and Lucile Packard Foundation; Dorothy and Jonathan Rintels Charitable Foundation; Erik E. and Edith H. Bergstrom Foundation; Ford Foundation; International Confederation of Midwives; Jadetree Foundation; Jeanne Kemp; Salt-Bush Fund of the Tides Foundation; Ruth Sherer; and the United Nations Population Fund.

How to use this book

Finding information

To find information, use the Contents, the Index, or the Tabs.

The **Contents** at the beginning of this book list the name of each chapter in the order in which it appears. Contents of each chapter are also listed at the beginning of that chapter.

The **Index** at the back of this book lists all the topics covered in this book in the order of the alphabet (a, b, c, d...).

Each page in this book has a number at the bottom. To find a chapter or topic in this book, find it in the contents or index, and then turn to the page number listed next to it.

Tabs on the right-hand pages separate most of the book into 5 sections. You can quickly find the information on staying healthy, infection prevention, pregnancy, labor and birth (including postpartum), and on other health skills, by turning to the sections labeled with those tabs.

Warnings, medicines, and notes

Warnings, medicines, and notes are separate from the main text.

Warning boxes show very important information. When you see this kind of box, you must take action to avoid danger.



WARNING! Do not insert an IUD for a woman who has signs of infection. The infection can spread to the womb.

Medicine boxes show how to give medicines. Read these boxes very carefully, and always look in the Medicines Pages starting on page 467 before giving a medicine.

These pictures show how the medicines in the box are given — in this case as tablets.



To lower a fever

- give 500 to 1000 mg paracetamol..... by mouth, every 4 to 6 hours as needed (do not take more than 4000 mg in a day).

Notes show information that is useful, but not directly connected with the information around it.

Note: Clean hands do not stay clean for long. If you touch anything other than the mother's genitals, you must wash again.

Understanding pictures of the body

How we show the outside of the body

When we draw a person, we try to draw her whole body. If we do not have enough room, we only show part of her body.

This picture shows a mother pushing her baby out of her vagina.



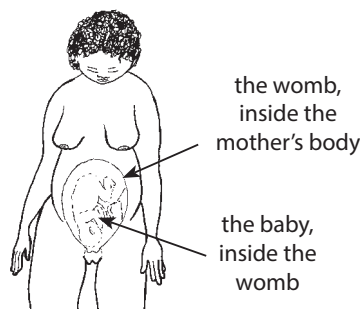
If it is important to see the baby's head and the vagina more clearly, we will show only that part of the body, so we can make the picture bigger.



How we show the inside of the body

Sometimes we need to show what is happening inside a woman's body. So we include pictures that show what a woman's body would look like if you could see inside of her.

Usually, we use thick lines to show the outside of a woman's body, and thin lines or dotted lines to show what is happening on the inside.



A note on language

Medical and technical words Throughout this book, we try to use easily understood words for parts of the body and things that the body does. We also explain the medical words we use. If there is a medical or technical word you do not understand, you can look it up in the index and see if it is explained in the book. Or you can look in the glossary on page 507, which lists some medical and technical words that are useful to know.

Getting help

The information in this book is not always enough to help you solve a health problem. When this happens, get help! Depending on the problem, you should:

Get medical advice. A skilled health worker or doctor should be able to help you decide what to do. This is not usually an emergency.

Get medical help. The woman or her baby need to see a skilled health worker or doctor for tests or treatment as soon as possible.

Go to a medical center or hospital. There is an emergency. Take the woman or her baby to a hospital right away for surgery or other immediate help.

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: Words to midwives 1

Learning is lifelong	1	Work to improve women's health	8
Share what you know	3	Work for the joy of it.	11
Respectful and compassionate care	6		

Chapter 2: Treating health problems.....12

Finding the causes of health problems	13	Finding root causes of health problems	21
Finding the best treatment	16	Midwives can make change	25

Chapter 3: A woman's body in pregnancy26

A woman's sexual and reproductive parts.	27	How women become pregnant	29
--	----	-------------------------------------	----

Chapter 4: Helping women stay healthy.....32

Eating well	33	Things to avoid during pregnancy and breastfeeding.	45
Caring for the body for good health	42		

Chapter 5: Preventing infection.....48

Preventing infection saves lives	49	Clean the space and bedding	57
Prevent infection by keeping germs away	52	Clean and disinfect or sterilize tools	59
Clean your hands and wear protective clothing	53	Get rid of wastes safely	67

PREGNANCY

Introduction70

Chapter 6: Common changes in pregnancy.....72

Changes in eating and sleeping	73	Changing feelings and emotions	82
Body changes and discomforts.	76		

Chapter 7: Learning a pregnant woman's health history.....84

Questions in a pregnancy health history	86	Malaria.	98
Does she have signs of pregnancy?	86	HIV.	99
How pregnant is she now? When is the baby due?	88	What else in her life might affect her pregnancy and birth?	104
Has she had any problems with past pregnancies or births?	93	Community organizing for emergency care	106

Chapter 8: Prenatal checkups..... 108

Talk with the mother.	109	Check for sexually transmitted infections.	128
Check the mother's body	115	Signs of bladder or kidney infection . .	128
Check for signs of diabetes.	115	Check the baby	130
Check for signs of anemia	116	Measure the mother's womb	130
Weigh the mother	118	Find the position of the baby.	135
Check the mother's temperature . . .	119	Listening to the baby's heartbeat . . .	139
Check the mother's pulse	120	What to do if you find warning signs	142
Check the mother's blood pressure . .	122	After the checkup	144
Check for signs of pre-eclampsia . . .	125	Record of prenatal care	145

LABOR AND BIRTH

Introduction 146

Chapter 9: Getting ready for labor and birth 148

Signs that labor will start soon.	149	What to bring to a birth	151
When to go to the birth	151	Sterilize your tools and wash up . . .	153

Chapter 10: Giving good care during labor and birth 154

What happens during labor and birth.	155	Be ready for emergencies	163
Care for the mother during labor. . .	157	Keep a record of what happens during labor	164

Chapter 11: Opening: Stage 1 of labor 166

What happens during stage 1.	167	The mother's pulse	178
When you first arrive.	168	The mother's temperature.	178
Helping the mother relax in stage 1. .	169	The mother's blood pressure	180
Signs for the midwife to check in stage 1.	170	Bleeding during labor.	183
The baby's position.	170	Pain in the womb	183
The baby's heartbeat	172	Watch for signs of progress.	185
The bag of waters.	174	Safe ways to encourage labor	191

Chapter 12: Pushing: Stage 2 of labor 194

Watch for signs that stage 2 is near or starting	195	Help the mother give birth.	206
What happens during stage 2	196	Baby is breech	215
Help the mother have a safe birth . .	199	Delivering twins	219
Watch for warning signs	202	Baby is very small or more than 5 weeks early.	221

Chapter 13: The birth of the placenta: Stage 3 of labor	222
Check the mother's physical signs . . .	223
Bleeding after birth	224
Watch for signs the placenta has separated	227
Help her push out the placenta	227
Watch for bleeding after the placenta is born	236
What to do for the baby	240
Chapter 14: The first few hours after the birth.....	246
What to do for the mother	247
What to do for the baby	252
General appearance.	253
Breathing, heartbeat, temperature . .	254
The baby's body.	256
Clean up and answer questions	267
Chapter 15: The first weeks after the birth	268
What to do for the mother	269
Watch her womb and bleeding	270
Watch for signs of womb infection . .	271
Watch for signs of vaginal infection . .	272
What to do for the baby	274
Encourage the baby to breastfeed and watch how she grows	274
Care for the cord	277
Look for signs of infection	277
Watch the color of the baby's skin and eyes.	279
Chapter 16: Breastfeeding	280
Breast is best	281
How to breastfeed	282
When the mother works outside the home	284
Common difficulties while breastfeeding.	286
Situations that affect breastfeeding . .	291
Alternatives to breastfeeding	294
HEALTH SKILLS	
Introduction	296
Chapter 17: Family planning	298
Choosing a family planning method .	300
Chart: family planning methods . . .	301
Making family planning work for the community.	318
Chapter 18: Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)	320
What are STIs?	321
Abnormal discharge from the vagina.	323
Sores and growths on the genitals . .	329
STIs that affect the whole body	334
Teaching women how to prevent STIs.	336
How to help stop STIs in your community	337
Chapter 19: Advanced skills for pregnancy and birth	338
Vaginal exams during labor	339
Home methods for starting labor . . .	341
Injections.	345
How to give fluid through a vein . . .	350
Catheters	352
Episiotomy.	354
Sewing a tear or an episiotomy	356
Caring for a woman after female genital cutting (circumcision)	367
Turning a breech or sideways baby . .	369

Chapter 20: The pelvic exam: How to examine a woman's vagina and womb...	372
When to do a pelvic exam	374
Before the exam.	375
The pelvic exam.	376
Chapter 21: How to insert an IUD.....	392
Help a woman decide if an IUD is right for her	394
Before you insert an IUD	395
Inserting an IUD	396
After you insert an IUD.	402
Removing an IUD	403
Chapter 22: Helping a woman after a pregnancy ends early.....	404
Problems from a pregnancy that ends early	405
Emergency care for problems after miscarriage or abortion	410
Infection	413
Bleeding.	416
Shock	418
Work with the community to prevent unsafe abortions	419
Chapter 23: Manual vacuum aspiration.....	420
Deciding when to do MVA	422
Getting ready for the MVA	423
Doing the MVA	426
Problems with the MVA	432
After the MVA	434
Chapter 24: Getting medical help	436
What medical centers and hospitals can provide.	437
Getting to a medical center.	442
Working with medical centers and doctors	442
Chapter 25: Homemade tools and teaching materials.....	446
Low-cost equipment	447
Teaching materials.	451
Medicines Pages	467
When to use medicines.	467
How to take medicines safely.	468
How to give medicines	471
Kinds of medicine.	474
Problem index.	476
Alphabetical list of medicines	477
Oral contraceptives	493
Medicines for HIV and AIDS	495
To learn more	503
Technical and medical words	507
Index	509
Due date calculator	531