
Technical and medical words

In this book we use simple and clear words as often as we can. We hope this makes the book easy to use for most people. Sometimes we use a simple word where most medical workers would usually use a more technical one, but it can be very helpful to know the technical word too. This is a short list of some of the words you might hear in a midwifery training program or in a hospital or medical center. If you want to know the meaning of a word that you do not see on this list, it may be explained somewhere in the rest of the book. Check the index, starting on page 509.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

amniotic fluid The liquid that surrounds the baby inside the womb.

anesthesia Medicine used to keep a person from feeling pain from a medical procedure. General anesthesia is a medicine given to make someone sleep during surgery. Local anesthesia is injected into the body to numb a small area.

bacteria Germs that cause infections. Bacteria can usually be killed with antibiotic medicines.

bilirubin A chemical in the bile or blood. When too much bilirubin builds up, it causes jaundice (the skin turns yellow).

biopsy When a piece of tissue or fluid is taken from part of the body and is examined in a laboratory to see if it is healthy or diseased.

bowel The end of the large intestine, near the anus where stool comes out of the body.

circulation Blood flowing through the heart, arteries, and veins.

complication A problem or thing that goes wrong.

contagious When an illness can pass from one person to another. These illnesses are caused by bacteria or viruses.

disinfection To kill or remove most of the germs on something. Tools that touch mucous membranes or broken skin should be disinfected before they are used.

ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy in the tubes)

A pregnancy that grows in the fallopian tubes or anywhere outside the womb.

embryo The beginning stage of a baby early in pregnancy, from the second to the eighth week.

engagement (engaged) When a baby's head is deep in the pelvis soon before birth.

engorgement (engorged) When a part of the body is filled with fluid, often blood. Breasts engorged with milk are common after birth and can be very painful.

fallopian tubes (tubes) The tubes that connect the ovaries to the womb. A woman's eggs travel through the tubes.

fertilization (conception) When a woman's egg joins with a man's sperm — the beginning of pregnancy.

forceps Medical tools for pulling. A small forceps can be used to hold tissues or sewing needles. Obstetrical forceps are used to help bring a baby out.

genitals The inner and outer parts of the body that are used in sex and producing babies — including the labia and vagina, and the penis and testicles.

hemorrhage Severe bleeding.

hemostat A medical tool for clamping. Hemostats can be used to clamp the cord so that blood does not come out of it when it is cut.

intestine A long, winding tube that carries food from the stomach and then waste to the anus.

invasive procedure A medical procedure deep inside the body or that cuts the skin.

kidneys Two large organs in the lower back that make urine by cleaning waste from the blood.

ligaments Strong fibers in a person's body that help hold muscles and bones in place.

membranes The bag that holds the baby and waters (amniotic fluid) during pregnancy.

menstrual cycle The time and changes in a woman's body from the beginning of one monthly bleeding to the beginning of the next. This includes bleeding, some days when a woman is not fertile, and the days when the lining of her womb grows to prepare for a possible pregnancy and an egg is released from her ovary.

menstruation (monthly bleeding) When bloody fluid comes out of a woman's womb and out of her vagina. It happens about once a month and lasts a few days.

midwife A person who cares for a woman's health needs, especially during pregnancy and birth.

obstetrics The branch of medicine that deals with the care of women during pregnancy and childbirth.

premature Before full development. A baby is premature if born before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

prolapse When part of the body drops or falls. When the cord comes out before the baby is born it is a prolapsed cord.

Rh factor A blood type that can cause problems in pregnancy. A person with a certain protein in her blood is said to have "Rh+" blood. People who do not have this protein have "Rh-" blood. If a woman with Rh- blood is pregnant, and her baby has Rh+ blood (this can only happen if the father has Rh+ blood), her body can produce antibodies that fight any future pregnancies she has. This can cause miscarriages or other problems in those future pregnancies. If a woman has a miscarriage or stillbirth, and does not know why, you could have a laboratory check her blood. If she is Rh-, she may be able to get a medicine called Rho(D) Immune Globulin during her next pregnancy to protect her baby from problems.

scrub Washing the hands, fingernails, and forearms carefully and thoroughly for several minutes to remove most germs.

sterilize To kill or remove all the germs on something. Tools that are used to cut into the body or that come in contact with wounds must be sterilized before they are used.

tissue The material that makes up the muscles, fat, and organs of the body.

uterus (womb) The organ in the body where monthly bleeding comes from and where a baby grows during pregnancy.

virus A germ that can cause infections and sicknesses. Viruses cannot be killed with antibiotics, but there are some new drugs that can help fight some viral infections.