

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts, *Taking Back Birth*. I'm Maryn, and I've been doing these podcasts for a bunch of months now. And here I am at the almost end of my pregnancy. And today's topic is supplies for birth. I thought this was a no brainer just because I am finally mentally there. A bunch of weeks ago I think I said on one of the podcasts I was nowhere near getting things ready, in that sense. I was still emotionally processing lots of things, as it should be. But now that the time is drawing physically really near I am on to okay. What do I need? Where is it? Where do I put it? That kind of thing.

And I know many women are asking the same thing whether they've had home births before or not. Maybe this is your first midwife assisted birth. Maybe you are planning an unassisted birth, and that's a very common question that comes up. What do I need? Where do I get it? So that's where we are today. So what do you need? I think it's a larger question, which I tend to do, right? It's never as simple as what you see is what you get. What do you need to have a baby? What is needed for birth? I think that's a loaded question. I think we will agree—most of us listening—that birth, say in a hospital setting for example, is really complicated.

If you've ever had a hospital birth or witnessed one, there is a whole lot of stuff in the room. And there is a table with tons of equipment and tools and this and that and people and machinery. And it makes it look like birth is really complicated. And that we need lots of stuff, so I think when I've worked with women that have had hospital births and they're planning a home birth they often feel really overwhelmed. They want to know what list I have or what they need way earlier in the pregnancy than say I did this time because they feel sort of scared and overwhelmed. They can't imagine what they would need at home to make up for all the stuff that they've needed at previous births and not been responsible for, right?

So if you're home, all of a sudden, you're responsible for getting these things in order and having the right stuff. So I'm sure I won't surprise you by saying that I don't think much is needed for birth in a normal healthy circumstance. Even when birth is planned to be at home, babies come out. And they come out on the sides of roads and all kinds of places. And while that's probably not an ideal circumstance, at least I don't think it would be for me, the point is that babies are born. And in most cases, there's just not a lot that anybody needs.

So I'm probably taking a little bit of a chance next week by going away—or actually at the end of this week—going away to Las Vegas, which is about five or six hours from here. This close to potentially having a baby. But just to illustrate to you that I really do believe you don't need a whole lot. I'm not taking anything other than clothes and such. I'm not taking a birth kit. I'm not taking anything at all. I don't think my baby will be born there, but, I guess, there's always that chance, right? And I feel like I would make do with what was around or with what I could get quickly with having friends there. So I really do believe it. I really don't think we need a whole lot. But there are some things that people like to talk about, so that's what we'll do today.

So, obviously, it's different when you're the midwife at a birth what you would bring to a birth, right? To be outside the family. To be sort of this other entity, different germs and all that kind of stuff. If you're the midwife or the birth attendant, you're going to be thinking in a different way than you are as the birthing women. Birthing woman. Sorry. So different perspectives there. And I can offer some from each side. If you're having a midwife attended birth, and I have in the past, often the supply lists that you'll be handed by the midwife maybe a month before birth is long. I've seen some incredibly long lists. Some that took pages. And all kinds of medical equipment really from birthing stores and sheets and towels and this and that.

And on one hand, for people that have never had a home birth, I can see where that would be helpful just to be aware. Okay. Yeah. Extra trash bags are good. And having extra towels is good. But I do think that the list of medical type equipment has gotten a bit out of hand. Or is a bit out of hand for some midwives. I was looking online. There's probably a dozen birth stores, essentially, where, one, anybody can buy items for birth or birth kits as they're known. So many midwives will put together a kit under their name. And then you just go to the store online and buy their kit.

And I was looking. And their kits price anywhere from \$25, which seems reasonable, to over \$100, which seems sort of unreasonable to me knowing what I know. So it just depends on the midwife. It just depends on what she thinks birth requires which is a huge topic. What she sort of doesn't want to provide or does want to provide for her clients. So some midwives provide birthing pools and that kind of thing. And some don't. Everybody gets their own clean, totally new stuff. And then sort of how much extra she wants to have which I can speak from experience about. Back in the day when I had people order birth kits when I was a student and a very new licensed midwife, I certainly did utilize the birth kit idea.

And I kind of laugh now because it's totally not what I believe anymore. But there was all kinds of gloves. So nonsteriles and steriles. And we'll get into some more stuff. But I learned that I guess from the woman that I worked with, and she had everybody sort of order a ton of stuff. And really we weren't using it necessarily. At least, not a whole lot.

And so we were left over with just tons of extra gloves and bulb syringes and crazy stuff that I probably still have even from many years ago because we just didn't need that much. But yet, everybody was ordering this kit. So those are a couple reasons why I think midwife would choose to have a super expensive kit or not.

And some of the kits that are on the less expensive side, who knows why they are. You could probably just order that stuff independently or possibly not at all. But I think you should be able to pick and choose especially if you're having a midwife attended birth. Within reason. I mean there are things that if you're hiring a midwife you're essentially asking her to do. So I think it's reasonable to expect her to bring gloves and the like. And if you—if she says you need to order those, then you probably do need to get a hold of them somehow, if she's expecting people to have that stuff if she's not going to show up with it.

But there's just as many things that she may have in the kit that are completely unnecessary to her or you, if you decide. So just read that list carefully. I know that, at one point, we had people order crazy stuff. Foot printers is a big one. So a little ink pad basically to do foot prints. A pretend birth certificate. One of those things you fill out that's not real. Straws. So sometimes there's stuff on that list that you may decide to get elsewhere. You decide you don't need at all. And I would say that's definitely your prerogative as long as you have what she needs covered given that you've decided to hire her.

Other things that you might see in a midwife birth kit—and I'm mentioning these even for people that are having unassisted births because if you go to these birth stores online they may have birth kits already set up. Or they do. I know they do. So a basic birth kit or a more complicated birth kit. And I think even among unassisted birthers there's sort of this not completely understanding what all these things are for, so they may just go ahead and order this big box of stuff they don't need. So in other words, if you're hiring a midwife and you want her there, then providing gloves for her seems reasonable. But if you're having an unassisted birth, I guess you should think about the things in the kit and why you would need them because you're not the midwife. And you're not going to have one there.

So things would be gloves, gauze, sterile gloves, a lube jelly. Those are—that's for vaginal exams. Measuring tape. Cord clamp. Vitamin K. I've seen midwives include drugs in their birth kits. So Pitocin for hemorrhage. Now you can't order that in most cases as somebody that isn't licensed. So that wouldn't be part of an unassisted birth kit anyway. I can't imagine. But just so you know what could potentially be in one. Alcohol pads. A catheter. Oil for the perineum. Compresses. Bulb syringe. A DeLee, which is a super bulb syringe that a lot of midwives carry to suction babies with. And sutures. So I know as a student and in many midwifery practices especially around

here I found some lists—those things appear in every birth kit. So these are why these birth kits are over \$100. There's tons of equipment in there. Most of which isn't necessary. But should direct your brain to possibly asking some questions.

So if Pitocin, an antihemorrhagic, is included in every birth kit, perhaps that would spark some interest in you. And you'd want to know why. Is Pitocin something this midwife needs all the time? Because that's interesting. Does she see a lot of hemorrhage? Does she know other ways to control it? Do you know what Pitocin is? Do you know the risks and benefits? Do you know the side effects? It shouldn't be something that just shows up at your house in the mailbox without knowing what you just paid for. Not only is some of it expensive stuff, but I think it definitely communicates a deeper level of somebody's understanding and trust in birth.

So if you're concerned about those things, something like Pitocin would spark you to ask some questions. As would the sutures. The midwife I worked with years and years ago had everybody get a birth kit with sutures in them. And in fact, she still does. So that works, I suppose, for her and her practice. But I think being wiser at this point in my life I would be asking some serious questions if sutures appeared on my doorstep in a birth kit because the percentage of women that should need sutures or stitches after birth in their perineum, perineal, vaginal, rectal area should be really, really, really, really, really small at a home birth. And so if it's not, you need to find out why. Some midwives just like to suture. They just think it's fun, and they like to practice on people which is kind of awful. But it happens.

And then I suppose that some midwives see what they think are legitimately—things that legitimately need to be sutured. And, again, I would ask questions about that because gentle, physiological birth rarely produces the need for sutures. That's just the truth. Once in awhile babies will do crazy stuff. Maybe come out with a hand here or there and a mom's body will be more damaged than it would be just naturally. But that's rare too. So, again, if someone is including sutures in their birth kit then you need to know why.

The other things along those lines would be bulb syringes. I don't really know anybody that suction babies routinely anymore. And for the rare baby that does need to be suctioned, then the mom whether she has a midwife attended birth or is unattended should know how to suction her own baby. And it doesn't have to be with a bulb syringe. It can just be with your mouth. You're the mom. So that would be the best way to suction a baby anyway.

A hat. I can't tell you when I was looking online at these birth kits for midwives all over the country how 99 percent of them still are including hats in their birth kits. Now this isn't a podcast about why not to wear a hat, but I can give you a little tidbit at least so

you know not to put a hat on your newborn baby. There's all kinds of reasons. It messes with the baby's temperature. It messes with bonding between you and the baby, smells, and all kinds of things. So the idea that a baby needs to stay warm by wearing a hat after birth is not scientific and may do more damage than we ever thought it did because it interferes with bonding.

So, again, that's sort of a loaded topic from just seeing a hat listed as an item in a birth kit to going to the extent of saying that they're dangerous. I agree might seem like quite a stretch. But like always, I think my intention is to draw your attention to sort of these insidious things that happen behind the scenes that mess with what our bodies know and what our babies know. And hats—newborn hats—is one of those things. So please don't put a hat on your baby. Don't order a hat for your baby especially some icky one from some factory that comes in a birth kit. Not to say you can't put a hat on your baby days after birth. But why would you do it initially? And why would you let someone else do it? And why would it be part of your immediate birth experience? Enough to be included in a birth kit.

So those are some things to think about in that birth kit. And, again, this may be a birth kit that comes for an unassisted birth. It doesn't mean anyone is telling you, but the ones that are set up such as basic birth kits or emergency birth kits these are items that are often included. Oil for the perineum is one. Another one. So I believe in a totally hands off birth experience unless a baby is really, really needing help. And I happen to be the one attending the birth. But otherwise as unassisted births go and even having someone there keep your hands off the mom. Keep your hands off the perineum and the baby. You shouldn't be using compresses. There shouldn't be oil. There shouldn't be stretching. There shouldn't be hands. So anything in the birth kit that communicated that that might happen, that would be a good opportunity for conversation.

And, again, like I say all the time, does anybody mean harm necessarily? Are these midwives evil? No. Not at all. This has just been part of their routine or their protocol. A lot of the midwives still doing these things are actually the much older midwives, who just are too busy in their practice to necessarily keep up with what women want or what the research may be. So it's not something I think that's meant to be intentionally harmful. It's just as the birthing women of this day and age we need to understand what these things are for and why we may not want them and why we may want to have these conversations beforehand. Because it's certainly not a conversation you're going to have in the moment of birth.

So that's kind of a standard birth kit, if you're going to order a kit. And, again, obviously, I'm not a big fan of kits for that reason because most of this stuff—almost all of it—I personally would not bring even as the birth attendant. And I definitely wouldn't have for my own personal birth. So think about that if you're ordering a birth kit. You don't need

most of these things. And if somebody tells you you do then I think you need to look at their beliefs and your beliefs and figure out what's what and ask some questions.

So what do you actually need? I think that you need very little from a birth store even though it might be fun to go shopping before birth. Other than if you're going to do a water birth, then that's probably a good reason to look at some of the online birth stores. They have birth kits that are water birth kits that include everything you'd need for a water birth. And I think those are really kind of good ideas, if you haven't had a water birth before especially. Then you don't have to go looking far and wide. And especially right now in January, at least around here, you're not going to find pools locally at Walmart or lots of hoses. It can be seasonal. So I think the water birth kits can be a great idea for just making sure you get everything you need. There's nothing worse than being in labor and having the wrong faucet adaptor, for example. So I think that is a different kind of birth kit that I would recommend for those planning water births.

But otherwise, what do you need? If you're not going to order one of these birth kits or if you're going to pick and choose, what do you actually need? So my list I think is pretty simple although it may be complicated for some people. I don't know. A lot of it is just sort of house items. So, again, as much as I don't like a place like Walmart, it's one of our few choices around here for getting sort of just stuff. Walgreens. The grocery store. These are the places I go to get most of what I need for birth because really all I think I need, at this point having been through it and seen a lot of births, is some blue pads. So those are the under pads. And, again, Walmart, Walgreens, CVS. Any kind of drug store type place.

You want the large or extra large under pads. And if you don't know what that is, think of the little puppy pads. Have you ever seen the little puppy training pads? Those are really small. But it's the same thing but really big. Or big enough for an adult woman. Not a puppy. And the reason I like those whether I'm attending a birth or for my own is just that they can be placed down anywhere and a woman can have a baby anywhere in her house. Bathroom, bedroom, on the bed, off the bed, whatever. And not that a towel doesn't suffice, but, for fluids and that kind of thing, the blue pads really do hold everything. So you don't have to worry about leakage or a mess or ruining towels. And it's just easy. I buy a package. You're only going to probably use a couple for birth anyway.

And then after birth, they're great for postpartum bleeding. When the bleeding is heavier in the first 12 hours, you can literally sit on these giant blue pads in bed and not worry about getting blood everywhere. On your sheets or your bed. And then you just keep changing them. So it's a really sanitary way to handle postpartum bleeding as well. So I always say to people that's pretty much all you need. Make sure you have some blue pads. And really if somebody didn't for whatever reason, you could still

totally make do. It's not like a birth couldn't happen without a blue pad. But that's my list. The blue pads.

And getting food at the store. Food that I might think I want. Easy to eat kind of stuff. Food for other people. Certainly, towels are good for whatever. Who knows? Maybe to birth on. Maybe just to clean up something or to have around or for the baby. I don't usually buy new towels but just make sure that I have some washed and in a certain place. Maybe covered. My kids like to take piles of towels that I've already washed and scatter them around the house. So I might get a big Tupperware container and put all my birth supplies in. So a couple towels. The blue pads and just kind of put it away in my closets and that I know everything is safe and clean there.

A peri bottle is something that I think is pretty useful. And they're all of like \$0.99 at a birth store. So whether or not it's worth it to order just a peri bottle remains up for debate. But I guess I just have a bunch of them as funny as that sounds. But a peri bottle is just a plastic squeeze bottle. I suppose you could use any kind of squeeze bottle as long as it was clean. And that's for after birth just to wash or not to wipe after you've used the toilet because the area is sensitive. It's also great to fill with an herb bath tea that you can use on your bottom and kind of squirt onto there. So I love the peri bottle.

And the herb bath is another thing that I would have as—that's a postpartum thing I suppose. But that, for me, is part of my birth kit whether I attend births or for myself. I really like to have herbs brewed up after birth and to use them as a sitz bath whether it's in the hours or the days following birth. It just feels really good to me as kind of part of my routine. Cord care. People are always wondering about cord care. What do you need? You can buy clamps from any of the birth stores. Probably the simplest thing, if you're only buying a clamp for your baby, is a big plastic clamp. They are ugly. They're not expensive, but they are cumbersome. And then you'll need a way to take it off. So you'll probably have to buy some kind of remover or—I don't know. Figure out how to get it off. But people are always kind of concerned about the cord.

So I guess for me I'm kind of an oddball because I have stuff from births. But if I didn't, you really can use dental floss to tie off a cord. And then just a clean scissor. You really can use string or—I can't think of it. Embroidery thread. It's not—it shouldn't be that big of a deal to tie off a cord, and the bigger subject, of course, is why would you be tying it off and cutting it so soon. I've seen midwife attended births where the cord is cut and clamped or clamped and cut rather within 15 to 20 minutes after birth, and they think that's delayed clamping. I'm not going to go on about delayed clamping right now. But to me delayed clamping is hours and hours after birth.

So, for me personally, that's what I do. It's probably three or four hours until I cut the cord. And at that point, it doesn't need to be clamped. And if it did, I would have string or something there. So it's one of those things people make a huge deal about especially first home birth or unassisted birth. How are we going to cut the cord? Or what do we need? It's just really not a big deal. If everything goes smoothly as it probably will, then there's no reason the baby should even be detached from the placenta for a very long time. So by the time you cut it, there really is no blood flow left at all. And people get up tight about germs getting in the cord. If it's not clamped or tied, that's your choice. I haven't personally seen that happen. And I know that there are many midwives that don't necessarily clamp but just cut later. So it's a personal choice, but it doesn't need to be super complicated is my point.

I do have a little scale—a fish scale—like a brass scale and a sling that I like to weigh my babies on and that I offer to other parents if they'd like to weight their babies. Weighing a baby—some people think it's totally unnecessary. I personally just think it's fun. I like to see what the baby weights, and I can do it really gently. And I can do it myself, and anybody can do it themselves by having that equipment. Other things for birth that I might have on hand will just be essential oils. I've talked about essential oils in other podcasts and how they're important in my life, so it's not just something random I have around. I would have some if I felt like I needed them.

Rescue Remedy. I've had in the past and has been helpful. That's a Bach flower essence. And a bowl for the placenta. So some people don't care what that is. Just whatever comes out of their kitchen. If you're having a water birth, you may want a bowl that floats. And we have a bowl that—or a couple bowls that are pretty or special to us that we've used for placentas in the past. So for me, I'd probably have one of those around. But that may even be a long list honestly for some people because here I am saying you don't need a whole for birth and then reading off this long list. But of the list I just read you what is really necessary probably not any of it other than having a place to have the baby inside where it's warm away from the elements.

I think that's all that we really need. Having access to water is probably a good thing. But yeah. It does make you think when you start to get birth supplies together what actually is needed and what is just comfort and what is just oh, I'll have it around kind of thing. And what you would seriously need, if you did go into labor away from home or whatever it is. And for me, again, the answer is not much. But the things like blue pads, I think, just make it sort of more organized in my brain and easier clean up for myself or my husband or whoever. And the other things are just sort of routine things I've had around.

So, again, think about these things. You can order kits or order supplies as you think you need. And with water birth, as mentioned, there are definitely extras involved that

you'd want to know about. And with water birth, you may even decide to set it up ahead of time—set the pool up for a trial run a week before or two weeks before. Not that you can't take it down but just so you make sure the pool doesn't have holes and that you know how to attach the hose to the faucet and that kind of thing, so that you're prepared in that way. Because although you don't need a lot if you're planning a water birth, you want to make sure that you have access to the pool before labor is over unless, of course, you don't care. And that's probably not the worst thing, right? To have a fast enough labor that you don't even have time to set up the pool. I've certainly seen that.

So kind of two different scenarios there. Anyway, hope that helps. Hope that helps you get together your supply list for birth. And if you have any questions, as always, please email us. Maryn@indiebirth.com or even info@indiebirth.com. Check out our classes and occasional webinars, if you'd like to learn more about the birth process and unassisted birth or just hands off midwife birth. And we wish you the best, and we'll see you soon. Thanks so much.

(closing music)