THE MUSLIM MOTHERHOOD

Key Words

A glossary for pregnancy, labour and birth

Maternity care comes with a language of its own — and it's hard to ask good questions about words you don't understand. This is a plain-language glossary of the terms you're most likely to hear, grouped by stage, so you can walk into any appointment or the labour ward already understanding what's being said.

DURING PREGNANCY

Amniotic fluid
The fluid surrounding your baby in the womb, sometimes called your "waters."

Antenatal
Care and appointments before birth — "antenatal" simply means "before birth."

Booking appointment
Your first, longer midwife appointment, usually around 8–10 weeks, where your care plan starts.

Braxton Hicks
"Practice" tightenings of the womb before labour — usually irregular and not painful.

Engaged
When your baby's head has moved down into your pelvis, ready for labour.

Fundal height
A measurement (in cm) from your pubic bone to the top of your womb, used to check your baby's growth.

Gestation
How many weeks pregnant you are, counted from the first day of your last period.

Presentation
Which way up your baby is — "cephalic" means head-down, "breech" means bottom or feet first.

Trimester
One of three roughly 13-week stages of pregnancy — first, second, and third.

CONDITIONS TO KNOW

GBS (Group B Strep)
A common bacteria some women carry, usually picked up through a swab or urine test in late pregnancy.

Gestational diabetes
A form of diabetes that can develop during pregnancy, usually managed with diet or medication.

Pre-eclampsia
A condition involving high blood pressure in pregnancy.

LABOUR & BIRTH

Assisted delivery
Birth helped along with ventouse (suction cup) or forceps.

Catheter
A thin tube used to drain your bladder during labour or after an epidural, when you may not be able to feel the urge to go.

Crowning
The moment your baby's head is visible and about to be born.

CTG monitoring
Continuous electronic monitoring of your baby's heartbeat and your contractions, usually via belts on your bump. Some hospitals also offer wireless (bluetooth) monitoring, so you don't have to stay in bed.

Dilation
How open your cervix is, measured in centimetres up to 10cm ("fully dilated").

Effacement
How thinned-out (rather than open) your cervix has become — often happens alongside dilation.

Entonox
"Gas and air" — an inhaled pain relief you control yourself during contractions.

Epidural
An injection in your back that numbs sensation from the waist down — an effective pain relief option.

Episiotomy
A cut made to the perineum to widen the vaginal opening during birth. This requires your informed consent.

Established labour
When your cervix has dilated to around 4cm or more, with regular, strengthening contractions.

Meconium
Your baby's first stool, sometimes passed before birth and found in the waters.

Perineal tear (degrees)
A tear to the perineum during birth, graded 1st to 4th degree by depth.

Perineum
The area of skin and muscle between the vagina and anus, which can stretch or tear during birth.

Rupture of membranes
When the amniotic sac ruptures, releasing fluid — commonly called your "waters breaking." This may happen spontaneously (SROM), before labour starts (PROM — premature rupture of membranes), or be done for you by a doctor or midwife (AROM — artificial rupture of membranes).

Show
The mucus plug that seals your cervix coming away — can happen days before labour starts, or right before.

Skin-to-skin
Placing your baby directly on your bare chest right after birth — supports bonding and warmth.

Third stage
The stage after your baby is born, when the placenta is delivered — this can be active (managed with medication) or physiological (naturally occurring).

Transition
The final, most intense part of labour, just before you're fully dilated and ready to push.

POSTPARTUM

Afterpains
Cramping caused by the uterus contracting and shrinking back to its normal size.

Baby blues
Common low mood or tearfulness in the first two weeks after birth — different from postpartum depression.

Colostrum
The first, nutrient-rich milk your body produces, often before your full milk supply comes in.

Diastasis recti
The separation of your ab muscles during pregnancy and postpartum.

Fourth trimester
The first twelve weeks (around three months) following birth as the mother adapts physically and emotionally.

Latching
How your baby attaches to the breast to feed — a midwife or lactation consultant can help if it feels difficult.

Lochia
Postpartum vaginal bleeding containing blood, mucus, and uterine tissue.

Mastitis
Inflammation or infection of breast tissue.

Postpartum check
A review with your GP, usually around 6 weeks after birth, checking on your physical and emotional recovery.

Using this glossary: if a word comes up that isn't here, it's always reasonable to ask your midwife or doctor to explain it in plain language — that's part of informed consent, not an inconvenience.