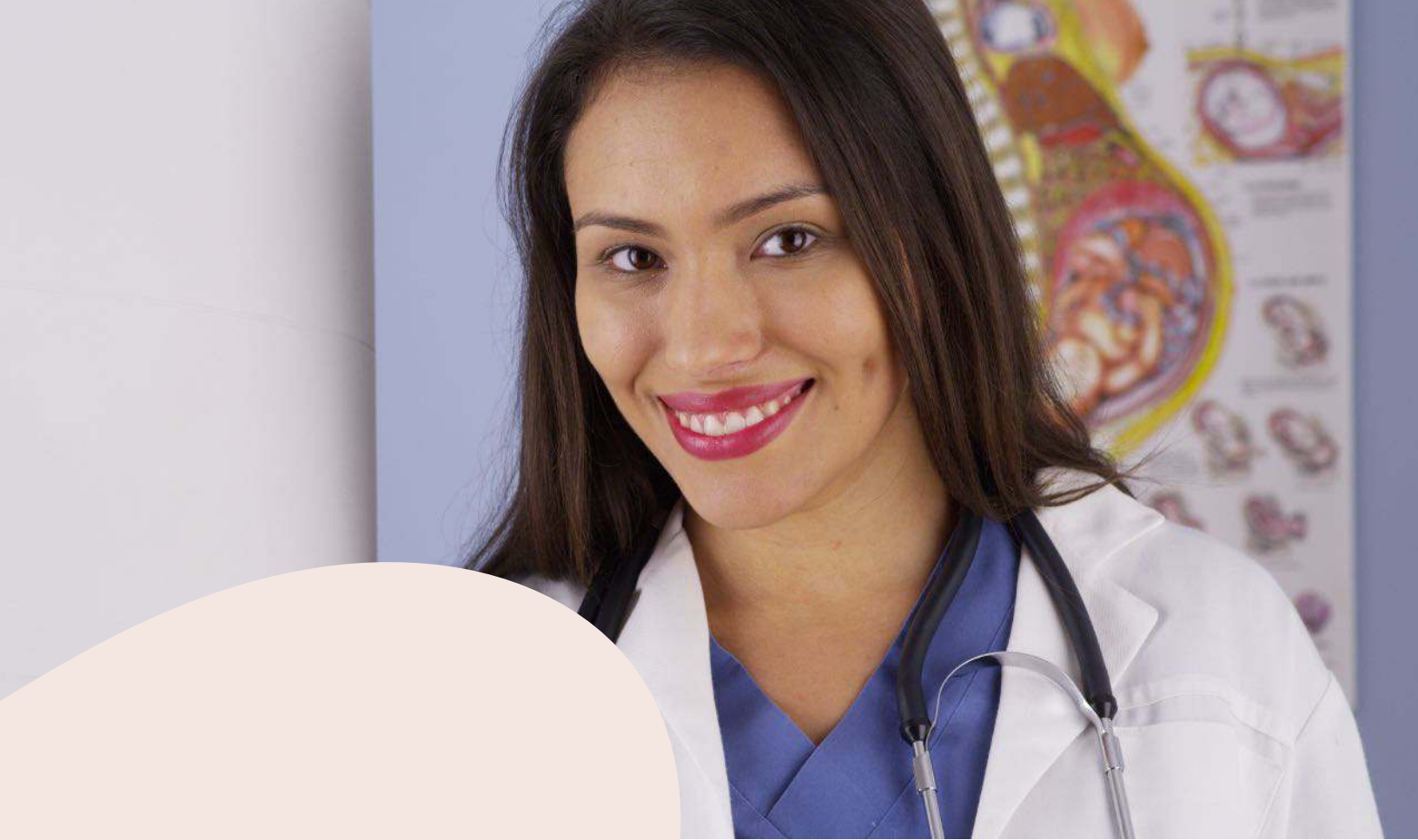




My Size-Friendly Care Providers Guide

Jen McLellan | Plus Size Birth

A CHAPTER FROM THE MY PLUS SIZE PREGNANCY GUIDE



Size-Friendly Care Providers

Please repeat after me, “I am worthy of good medical care!” I want to encourage you to stop working with care providers who only prescribe self-loathing.

Your care provider works for you, so they shouldn't be working against you!



I had told myself over and over again that I would never get pregnant because of my size. My doctor had told me I would run the risk of having too many complications. The day I found out I was pregnant was the most exciting day of my life because I realized my body was not broken!

I found an incredible plus size-friendly midwife who treated me with nothing but respect. She brought my baby girl earth side and I am forever grateful!

Brittany

During pregnancy, you want to connect with someone who will not only provide excellent care but also build confidence in your ability to have a healthy outcome for you and your baby. Beyond just working with an OB-GYN or midwife who treats you nicely, you want to make sure they are accommodating to your unique needs. A size-friendly healthcare provider does just that!

Size-Friendly Care Provider = An OB-GYN or midwife who practices evidence based compassionate care.

Within this chapter we'll walk through how to find a size-friendly care provider, things to look out for, questions to ask and the differences between the obstetric (working with an OB-GYN) and midwifery models of care.

If you already have a care provider you like then that's great. However, just because you've built comfort with your current provider over years of well-women visits, doesn't always mean they are the best match for your prenatal care. It never hurts to do a little searching to be sure you're happy with your provider. If you don't particularly like your current provider or don't have one then let's drive right in!

How to Locate a Size-Friendly Care Provider

Start by asking your plus size mom friends if they have any recommendations! You can do this one-on-one or even do a Facebook posting.

Speaking of Facebook, even if you're not a parent yet, local mom groups can be a goldmine of helpful resources. Consider joining a local group and asking if any plus size moms might be open to sharing if they had a care provider they really liked. Moms in the Plus Mommy Community have shared this tip really works well!

Be sure to also check out our size-friendly provider listing to see if we already have someone listed located in your area - sizefriendly.com

If you have medical insurance provided through your employer, ask your mom co-workers if they loved their care provider.

Lastly, there's good old-fashioned research. If you have insurance, then start digging into their provider list and Google these providers like you would a potential blind date! Read online reviews and look for any red flags, like a lot of negative comments. Also, these days many doctor's offices have a Facebook page so look for reviews there as well.

This research tip is good for any care providers who you're referred to. Even if your best friend can't stop talking about how amazing their midwife was, still do your due diligence and your own research.

For example, if you're planning to have a [vaginal birth after cesarean](#) (VBAC) you'll want to connect with a provider who is not only size-friendly but also supports VBAC.

Once you have a few names you'll narrow down your list by this next step.

Call Ahead

Find out if you can interview a potential care provider over the phone or in person. If that's not possible, ask if the group sees people of all sizes. Do they have large blood pressure cuffs and gowns? Are there any BMI restrictions?

Unfortunately, BMI limitations are sometimes set at birth centers and for hospital water birth programs.

Listen to the tone of the person who is answering your questions to gauge how size-friendly their office might be.

Ask questions about how their office works. Do providers do on-call shifts or are you guaranteed, to the best of their ability, that your prenatal care provider will also support you during your birth? These are important things to know.

Next you can narrow down your list even further by picking a care provider that fits best with your needs. You'll be spending a lot of time at your provider's office near the end of pregnancy, unless you're working with a home birth midwife who does home visits, so proximity to their office might be a consideration.

Once you feel like you've found the best prospective care provider, it's time to have your first appointment. Consider even dropping by their office in person to schedule that first appointment so you can make some observations before making this commitment.

Make Observations

What's the accessibility to their office like? Check out the waiting room! Do all the chairs have arms or is there a place for you to be able to sit comfortably?

View the brochures in the waiting room, the posters and health promotional material, are they health and happiness promoting?

Once you're called back by the nurse, continue to make observations. How high does the scale go? How are you treated when you are weighed?

If you needed to wear a gown, were you provided with one that fit?

Another critical thing to note is if the care provider has a large blood pressure cuff or if they know how to properly take blood pressure from the lower arm.

Then once you meet your provider, pay attention to see if they are watching the clock and making you feel rushed or are they listening to and addressing your concerns.

Did they relate all of your medical concerns to your weight or did they look at the big picture of your health?

Please note that talking about diet and exercise aren't inherently stigmatizing. Listen to the way they discuss these topics with you.

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You'll be using the word "no" a lot for the next few years, might as well start by practicing on your doctor. When something doesn't seem right, speak up and say, "no".

Sarah

Ask Questions

Remember you are interviewing your care provider just as much as they are interviewing you. Feel empowered to make the decision to stay with someone who is a good fit or walk away from someone who makes you feel uneasy.

As women, and especially plus size women, we often stay in uncomfortable situations because we don't want to rock the boat. Society tells us "doctor knows best" but that's not always true. Care providers have their own biases and previous experiences that set the stage for how they practice.

On the following page you'll see a list of questions I recommend you consider asking but be sure to also write down things that are important to you and bring a list to your appointment. I can't tell you how many times my husband goes to the doctor and I ask him if he talked to his care provider about XYZ. His answer is often, "I forgot." I'm about to make him a list myself!

Speaking of my husband, bring a loved one or trusted friend along. It's always helpful to have someone on your side or someone you can simply look at for a reassuring smile when stressed. Plus, an extra set of eyes can help make sure the proper equipment is being used.

You'll want to be prepared to ask your provider a few questions when the time feels right during your exam.

Set a reminder on your phone. 5 minutes before your scheduled appointment time, have a reminder pop up with a note listing anything that's important for your upcoming appointment. We often spend quite a bit of time in the waiting room so this will give you a few minutes (at least) to review what you'd like to address with your care provider.

Here are some suggested questions to ask. Remember to continue to make observations and keep an eye on your doctor's expressions when you ask the tough questions.

1. What is your previous experience working with plus size people?

This question can be answered in numerous ways so you'll be looking for a sensitive and nonjudgmental answer. If they respond in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable then take note of that.

2. Will I be considered high-risk based only upon my BMI?

Within the United States a classification of high-risk based only upon a high BMI is not typical. Unless you already have a preexisting condition or incur a condition like gestational diabetes, you shouldn't be labeled as high-risk.

Care providers who automatically classify people of size as high-risk are often not size-friendly.

Providers who recommend a cesarean birth based only on your weight, and for no other reason, are **not** size-friendly.

3. Can you explain your pregnancy and birth philosophy?

This answer will provide you with insight if this care provider is a good match for you.

4. How do you typically manage prenatal care and birth with a low-risk patient?

Whether you're looking for someone who is more hands-on or hands-off, this can be assessed within the answer they provide. Also, a care provider might state their views on if you'll be classified as low-risk or not based upon your weight.

5. How often do you perform inductions?

Having an induction increases your risk of having a c-section. Since major abdominal surgery is not an optimal outcome for plus size people, you will want to do all you can to avoid having a c-section.

6. What is the c-section rate of your practice?

This can be very insightful. The c-section rate in most states is around 30% ([click here](#) to see your state).

If the practice is well above that number you'll want to ask why. Be aware that practices that see a lot of high-risk patients will often have higher c-section rates. If the number is lower it's a good indication they are using [evidence based medical practices](#).

7. Who will be the care provider at my birth?

Most OB-GYNs and even midwives work with a collective of professionals. Therefore, there's a possibility that your selected care provider won't be there for your birth. If that's the case, you'll want to know that upfront and make sure all of the providers within the group are size-friendly.

8. How do you feel about me laboring in different positions?

Having the freedom to move as your body directs during labor is ideal. This allows for additional comfort measures to be used and will help the baby descend into the birth canal. Note that movement during labor will become restricted if you'd like an epidural.

9. How do you feel about continuous fetal monitoring?

[Studies](#) show that a baby's heart rate can be monitored just as safely with the use of a doppler hand-held monitor or something similar intermittently throughout labor.

If you're planning on having an unmediated labor then you will want to find a care provider who is comfortable with intermittent rather than continuous fetal monitoring.

For continuous fetal monitoring, wireless patch systems often work better on larger patients. Ask if your selected medical facility offers wireless monitoring.

10. How do you feel about eating and drinking during labor?

This is another important question to ask if you're planning an unmediated birth. Being in labor is like running a marathon and you'll want fuel to provide you with extra energy. Studies show that people in labor need to eat and drink and restricting access to this is no longer evidence based.

11. What are your feelings on pain relief in labor?

This will allow you to see if your feelings regarding medication during labor mesh well with your care providers. If your views don't align then be sure to question if they'll be supportive of your desires for your labor and birth when the time comes.

12. What are your thoughts on Birth Plans?

Birth Plans aren't set in stone, but they do allow you to clearly state what your wishes are for your labor and birth. Having a care provider who wants to know your wishes in advance is ideal.

When it comes to writing a birth plan, make sure wishes are clearly stated but try to keep the document to a page or less. Review your plan with your chosen medical provider. Ask them if they will sign off on your plan and then make sure you have multiple copies available for your birth.

13. How would you feel if I disagreed with a recommendation you make during my labor or birth?

You'll want to hire a care provider who is open to your desires for your birth as long as you and the baby aren't in any harm. It is okay to disagree with your doctor, as long as you're a team and can both be honest.

14. How do you feel about doulas?

If you're considering working with a doula this is a critical question to ask. A doula is a trained professional who supports the pregnant person and their family during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.

15. Would you consider yourself a size-friendly provider and do you have any protocols for people of size that I should be aware of?

Just like the first question, this last question can be answered in numerous ways. You'll be looking for a sensitive and nonjudgmental answer. Make a mental note if the care provider responds in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Download a handout with all of these questions via the [Guide Appendix](#). You can print it off or have it easily accessible on your phone.

Listen to [episode 39](#) of the Plus Mommy Podcast where a midwife answers all of these questions and provides additional insights for connecting with a size-friendly care provider.



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You are interviewing your care provider and not vice versa. If you have a choice, make it. Don't limit yourself to one provider and not get the support you deserve. I drove extra just to be supported and it was well worth my fuel!!

Amanda

Trust Your Gut!

Overall, your gut is your best indicator if your care provider is size-friendly or not. Remember you have the right to get a second opinion or fire your care provider - it's never too late! I wish you the best with connecting with someone who enjoys caring for you as much as you enjoy going to them for support.

I do want to note that I know not everyone has choice in care providers. So if you're stuck in a difficult situation, you need to try and be honest with your care provider about the fact that you're uncomfortable.

No one deserves to be mistreated, especially when you're in a vulnerable situation. If you have no choice, be sure to have a support person attend every prenatal visit with you whenever possible and I highly recommend hiring a doula.

Being your own best advocate for you and your baby is critical during pregnancy.

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Do not be afraid to fire your doctor and move on. I had to do just that at 20 weeks and it was hard but she was not size-friendly at all. I knew I deserved better.

Allison

Informed Consent

Please be aware that as a mentally competent adult, your care provider must obtain your consent before performing any medical procedure. You have the right to disagree with them and say no at any point. You also have the right to get a second opinion or fire your care provider at your own personal discretion.

Sadly, I hear from women time and time again that they felt their care provider was size-friendly until the last few weeks of pregnancy. Then all of a sudden, there's an onslaught of tests and words like "induction" start being said during prenatal visits.

I can't reiterate enough the importance of not only asking care providers about their experience working with plus size people but also if they have any protocols for people of size that you should be aware of in advance. This way you're asking them to be upfront with expectations for your prenatal care if you don't develop any complications.

One really great tool I highly recommend using, when deciding if you want to proceed with an intervention (be it a simple blood test or considering scheduling a c-section) is the BRAIN acronym. This tool is also helpful if your care provider is pressuring you to make choices you are uncomfortable with.

USE YOUR BRAIN

- B** WHAT ARE THE **BENEFITS**?
- R** WHAT ARE THE **RISKS**?
- A** WHAT ARE THE **ALTERNATIVES**?
- I** ALWAYS LISTEN TO YOUR **INTUITION**.
- N** WHAT HAPPENS **NEXT** OR IF WE DO **NOTHING**?

PLUSSIZEBIRTH.COM

By asking these questions you are able to receive all the information you need to make an informed decision and thus your care provider is also receiving your informed consent.

Unless there is a true medical emergency, there should always be enough time for you to get all of your questions answered and feel like you're making the best medical decision for you and your baby.

This is a tool you can use for the rest of your life!

While doctors and midwives have spent years in school and have a wealth of experience, ultimately you are in charge of your own body and need to be your own best healthcare advocate. And you absolutely have the right at any point to get a second opinion or fire your care provider.

Ready to dive in deeper?



Downloading the My Plus Size Pregnancy Guide was the first and most important step I took on the path of agency and education in my pregnancy. Reading this e-book changed the whole trajectory of my pregnancy and my son's birth for the better.

Mia O'Malley

The **My Plus Size Pregnancy Guide** covers everything you could possibly need to know about being plus size and pregnant – from prenatal care expectations, nutrition, physical activity, the best plus size maternity clothing options, and more!

After really tapping into this unique resource, you are guaranteed to have almost no questions left when it comes to having (and loving!) your plus size pregnancy. Access the full [My Plus Size Pregnancy Guide](#) today!

Use coupon code GETMYGUIDE to receive 20% off the guide by itself or an audiobook along with the guide! Both options come with exclusive access to a private Facebook group.

Stop Googling and start feeling empowered today!

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