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## Obstetricians

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### Summary

- An obstetrician is a medical doctor who is specially trained to look after mothers and babies during pregnancy, labour and straight after birth.
  - If you are having a baby in the public system in Victoria, you will generally only see an obstetrician if you have a high-risk pregnancy or have unexpected problems during the birth. This will be free to Medicare card holders.
  - If you would like to choose your obstetrician, many work in private practice. In this case, you will have to pay for their services.
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An obstetrician is a medical doctor who is specially trained to look after mothers and babies during pregnancy, labour and straight after birth. Their training has provided them with the skills and experience to detect and manage obstetric and gynaecological problems.

### Choosing an obstetrician

If you are having a baby in the public system in Victoria, you will not be able to choose your obstetrician. You can request a female obstetrician if that is important to you, but this might not always be possible. Services delivered by obstetricians in public hospitals are provided free to Medicare card holders.

If you have a low-risk pregnancy and everything goes well at the birth, you might not see an obstetrician at all. If your pregnancy presents a higher risk, you are likely to see an obstetrician more often.

If you want to choose an obstetrician, you can choose one who works in private practice. That will mean paying for their services. If you have private health cover, you will be able to get some of the obstetrician's fees back from your health insurance company.

There are a number of ways you can choose an obstetrician:

- Ask your general practitioner (GP) for a recommendation and referral.
- Call the hospital where you would like to have your baby and ask which obstetricians deliver babies there.
- Ask a friend, relative or work colleague for a recommendation.
- Use the **Health Services Directory** on this website.

Once you have the name of an obstetrician, it is a good idea to meet with them. At this appointment, you can ask about their approach and talk about delivery options and your other care preferences. Ask about their fees and what will happen if they are not available when you go into labour. This will help you decide if the obstetrician is right for you.

Once you have chosen a private obstetrician, you will have regular appointments at key stages throughout your pregnancy, possibly assisted by a **private midwife** who works closely with the obstetrician.

### Your obstetrician appointments

Depending on your type of care, your health and your baby's health, an obstetrician might:

- provide information and talk about pregnancy care and birth
- organise tests and scans and then speak with you about the results
- monitor your health and your baby's health
- discuss general health and lifestyle issues such as diet, exercise and using medications during pregnancy.

### Obstetricians and other healthcare professionals

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Depending on your pregnancy needs and preferences, your obstetrician will work with other healthcare professionals in caring for you and your baby. These include GPs, hospital staff and midwives.

### **Your general practitioner (GP)**

Some pregnant women choose to have their GP closely involved with their pregnancy. This might be because they have a long-established relationship with their doctor or because it is more convenient to visit their GP than an obstetrician, especially in rural areas.

When GPs work with obstetricians to care for you during your pregnancy, this is called 'shared care'. In this case, you might see your GP for some antenatal appointments. During your pregnancy if you need a specific test or scan, or you develop complications, your appointments will be at the hospital (if you are a public patient) or with your obstetrician if you have a private arrangement.

GPs who provide shared care for pregnant women must have extra training and qualifications. If you would like your GP to be present when you give birth, they must have a special agreement with the hospital.

### **The hospital**

In the public health system, you will usually only see an obstetrician if your pregnancy is considered high risk or if you develop complications. If you would like to have your baby at a certain hospital *and* choose your obstetrician (in the private system), the obstetrician must have an arrangement in place with that hospital.

### **Private midwives**

Many obstetricians in private practice employ midwives to support them in their practice. They might administer basic antenatal care, schedule tests and scans and provide information and other support.

### **An obstetrician's role at the birth**

In the public system, an obstetrician will probably only attend the birth if there are complications or if you are having a high-risk pregnancy. Obstetricians are trained to deal with complications so will manage any problems and perform procedures or operations such as caesareans.

In the private system, your obstetrician (or another obstetrician with whom they work) will most probably attend the birth, depending on how quickly your labour progresses. If it is very quick, they might not arrive in time.

### **An obstetrician's role after the birth**

In the private system, your obstetrician will most likely see you for a postnatal check-up six weeks after the birth to discuss your pregnancy, your need for contraception and your desire for future pregnancies.

In the public system, an obstetrician will generally only see you after the birth if there have been complications. Otherwise your follow up care will be with your GP.

### **Where to get help**

- Your GP
- Your local birthing hospital
- Midwives Australia

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