

Knowledge Is the Foundation: Why What You Know Before Pregnancy Could Save Your Life

By Dr. Sharon Campbell, D.H.L., CD — The Architect Doula™

Picture two women walking into the same hospital, in the same week, with the same symptom: a headache that won't go away, and a little swelling in their hands.

One of them knows this combination can be a warning sign of preeclampsia, a dangerous pregnancy complication. She says so, clearly, the moment she checks in. The other has never heard the word “preeclampsia.” She mentions the headache almost as an afterthought, assumes it's normal, and goes home.

Same hospital. Same symptoms. Two completely different outcomes are now possible and the difference wasn't luck. It was information.

That's the entire idea behind the first pillar of the Architect Doula™ Framework: Education. Not a pamphlet handed to you in the waiting room. Not a generic checklist. Real, plain-language, culturally responsive knowledge, given to you before you need it so that when a warning sign shows up, you already recognize it.

What Research Actually Says

This isn't just a nice idea. It's backed by real evidence.

- **Health literacy and birth weight.** Researchers have found that pregnant women with stronger health literacy — meaning they understand and can act on health information — have measurably better outcomes, while babies born to mothers with lower health literacy face higher odds of preterm birth and low birth weight, according to a review from the Society for Women's Health Research.
- **Education reduces fear and builds confidence.** A systematic review of antenatal education programs found that prenatal education meaningfully reduced fear and anxiety around childbirth and increased what researchers call “self-efficacy” a mother's confidence in her own ability to make decisions and get through labor.
- **Fewer complications with structured teaching.** In a scoping review of health education interventions for pregnant women in under-resourced and minority communities, one program that provided structured prenatal teaching materials saw a real increase in prenatal care visits and a real decrease in complications like low birth weight and stillbirth.

In plain terms: teaching people what to expect and what to watch for doesn't just make them feel better. It changes outcomes.

What This Looks Like in Real Life

Education, done right, isn't about becoming a medical expert. It's about knowing the handful of things that actually matter, before you're in a room where it's hard to think clearly:

- **Warning signs.** What the real warning signs are for you and for your baby at each stage of pregnancy and postpartum.
- **Permission to ask.** What questions are normal to ask your provider, and that asking them is not “being difficult.”
- **Mental health awareness.** What postpartum depression and anxiety actually look like, so you or someone who loves you can name it early instead of dismissing it.
- **Knowing your options.** So, a decision doesn't get made for you simply because you didn't know you had a choice.

This is why the Architect Doula™ Framework treats education as the foundation, not an extra. An architect doesn't start with the walls. They start with what holds the walls up.

Why This Matters Beyond One Pregnancy

Black women and birthing people continue to face significantly higher rates of pregnancy-related death and complications than white women in the United States a gap that has persisted for years, not just spiked once. Some of that gap comes from bias inside the healthcare system. But part of what closes it is families walking in already knowing what to ask, what to watch for, and what a “no” from a provider should and shouldn't sound like.

Knowledge doesn't fix a broken system by itself. But it's very hard to advocate for yourself inside a system you don't understand. That's why education comes first.

This is Pillar One of the Architect Doula™ Framework a six-pillar approach to designing a stronger foundation for Black maternal and infant health, from before pregnancy through postpartum and beyond. Advocacy, Preparation, Connection, Leadership, and Legacy are next.

“We don't just prepare families for birth. We help them design a healthier future one blueprint, one family, and one generation at a time.”

Learn more or follow the work: [[www.thearchitectdoula](http://www.thearchitectdoula.com)]

Sources Referenced

- Society for Women's Health Research, *“Maternal Health Literacy: Educating Mothers to Keep Them Safe”*
- Systematic review, *“Influence of Antenatal Education on Birth Outcomes: A Systematic Review Focusing on Primiparous Women”*
- Kim et al., *“Impact of Health Literacy on Pregnancy Outcomes in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged and Ethnic Minority Populations: A Scoping Review,” International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*