



How To Make A Belly Cast

You will need:

- impregnated plaster of paris strips (from a craft or art supply store) -- at least two packages
- some petroleum jelly or cocoa butter (to lubricate mom's skin)
- a bucket or bin of water
- a big tarp, plastic sheet or old bed sheet

Steps:

1. Cut the Plaster of Paris Strips

Unroll the impregnated plaster of paris strips and cut them into lengths that will cover the expecting mother's belly. You will also need some strips for her sides and to criss-cross between her breasts (assuming you are including her breasts in the cast)

2. Prepare the Casting Area

A garage or basement is probably the ideal place to do a belly cast, unless you like cleaning plaster of paris out of your carpet. Lay down a tarp, plastic sheet, old bed sheet or layers of newspaper. Place a comfortable, but not fancy or expensive, chair in the center. If you like, cover the chair with a sheet too. Fill the bucket with warm water and place it near the chair. Have the cut plaster of paris strips nearby. Also, prepare an area where you will be able to leave the fresh cast to set overnight.



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3. Prepare the Pregnant Lady

If she is modest, you should create the cast before the Mother Blessing. To get a good cast of the entire belly, she really should only wear an old pair of underwear (as in ready to be thrown away anyway) to keep plaster of paris out of her pubic region. Use a generous amount of petroleum jelly or cocoa butter moisturizer to lubricate her belly and chest and any other body parts you want to include in the cast (but don't use too much as the plaster of paris strips may slip off). Don't forget to get under her belly too. Get her comfortable in the chair and use another sheet to cover her legs and shoulders that aren't being cast. You are welcome to get artistic about the position to make a belly cast in, but remember that the subject is pregnant and will have to remain comfortably in that position until the cast has set.

4. The Goopy Mess

Following the impregnated plastic of paris strips package directions, dip the plaster of paris strips into the bucket of water and apply them to the expecting mother. I recommend starting by placing two strips vertically from her arm pits to her hips as side bars for the cast. Then, criss-cross at least two strips between her breasts (or across them if she is large breasted). Next, apply the strips around her belly, making sure to overlap them sufficiently. Start at the bottom of her belly and continue up until you have covered her belly and breasts. Dip your hands in the water and spread the plaster evenly around her belly, smoothing out the strips. Repeat for a second layer. Mom will start to feel the inside of the cast drying, so work quickly to keep the first layer from drying too much before you get the second layer going. To finish, neatly tuck in the sides and edges, making sure they will be smooth when the cast is removed. Dip your hands in the water and smooth the plaster over the strips once again, making sure that everything is nice and smooth over her belly and breasts.



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5. The long wait

Now wash your hands and go get mom a nice cup of water with a straw so she can relax while you wait for the cast to harden. If you are her birthing partner, this will be good practice for remembering to keep her hydrated while she is in labor and putting up with her being cranky even though you are being really nice to her. Read the plaster of paris strips package directions as to how long it will take for the cast to set before it can be removed. When it is time, carefully pull the cast away from mom's body -- now we will find out how good of a job lubricating her belly you did!

6. Running for the shower

Lay the fresh cast down on newspaper to harden somewhere where it won't get bothered by pets or other children. At this point, you should lay it down, "belly up", and not try to display it. Tuck in or cut off any rough edges. Follow package directions for time to let it set. Now that you have the fresh cast set aside, help mom out of the chair. Get an old towel wet and try to get as much of the plaster off her as you can while she is still standing on the tarp or plastic sheet. Help her remove the old panties and throw them out. Help mom get to the shower without dripping too much plaster all over the place.

7. Decorating

Even a plain old belly cast is still astonishing, so you do not have to go any further. But if you like you can paint it with acrylic paints or decorate it with flowers, stones, shells, beads and even lacquer it for extra protection. This can make a fun Mother Blessing activity that doesn't compromise the modesty of the expecting mom. If you use varnish around pregnant people, make sure it is in a well ventilated area or even outdoors.



How To Do Belly Painting

You will need:

- Non-toxic body paints* OR
- Natural Henna "tattoo" kit*
- A Camera
- Comfy chair for mom to sit in while everyone paints her belly

Decorating suggestions include:

- sun
- stars
- moon
- sky
- flowers
- animals
- Asian or middle east characters or symbols
- female symbol
- fetus in utero
- plus spirals & art deco flourishes.

Notes:

- *Please do a patch test at least 24 hours before the Mother Blessing to make sure mom isn't sensitive to body paints and/or henna.
- Make sure you mention your intention to do a belly painting to the expecting mother so she knows to wear a separate top & bottom (skirt or pants). Dresses are not conducive to exposing that pregnant belly and decorating it!



How To Do Wrist Binding

You will need:

- A new package of cotton or hemp jewelry cord or yarn
 - You will need one long, unbroken piece of cord
 - You will need about 10 feet or more if you have a lot of guests
 - If you have a nice long piece of jewelry cord leftover from making a birthing necklace, it will do nicely!
 - However, do not use anything too strong as you will need to be able to cut it using one hand and you want it to be comfortable to wear.
- Scissors

How To Perform the Wrist Binding Ritual

Have everyone, including the expecting mother, stand in a tight circle. Each guest should wrap the cord around the wrist of the person to their left and say "From women, we are born into this circle, From women we are born into this world." When everyone is linked together, everyone should hold hands and make a wish for an easy birth. You can also sing a song here. After the wishes and songs, pass a pair of scissors around the circle and have each person cut the person to their left enough of the cord to keep wrapped around their wrist, plus enough to tie it. If the cord is made of natural fibers (wool, hemp or cotton), make sure you leave the bracelet loose as it will shrink when you wash your hands and shower. Everyone should be instructed to keep making their wish whenever they look down at their bracelet and keep wearing the bracelets until the baby is born.

Tips:

- Since you will have one hand "tied" in the circle, have the scissors handy near where you will make the circle. We once had to waddle as a group over to a pair of scissors!
- If any of your guests have occupations where they cannot wear jewelry or other "distractions" on their hands or wrists, it is OK for them to move the cord to their ankle and wear it there.
- I would not recommend using embroidery floss or any type of light string. If the baby is late, the floss will get really tattered and even fall apart.



How To Make A Birthing Necklace

You will need:

- Guests who have brought beads or trinkets
- Leather, hemp, or cotton cord, from craft or bead supply store, at least 2 feet long (you can cut it to fit after all trinkets have been strung)
- Jewelry needle to thread beads onto necklace
- Small rings, craft wire, embroidery floss or ribbons to attach odd-sized beads or trinkets to necklace, from craft or beading supply store

Instruction:

On the invitation, ask each guest to bring a small trinket or bead that symbolizes their wish for the mother and baby in labor and birth. Emphasize that it will be used to make a necklace for the mother to wear during labor.

Before the Mother Blessing begins, cut a length of coated beading wire to make a full-length necklace and either tie a knot in one end, or

add a crimping bead or necklace clasp to the end. Thread the other end through a beading needle to make it easy to place the beads on it. Place the prepared necklace into a small bowl or basket so it can be passed easily around the room.

At the Mother Blessing, going clockwise around the circle, have each guest explain the significance of their bead as they place their bead on the necklace. Alternately, you can have everyone present their beads to the mother and place them in a bowl for someone string them on the necklace after the presentations. The result is a necklace full of good wishes for the mother to wear and focus on while she is in labor.

Make sure you finish the necklace with a knot or clasp before you place around the expecting mother's neck.



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Tips:

Be prepared for people to bring very small, very large and odd-shaped trinkets that may or may not have a hole that you can attach to the necklace with. For this purpose, have some small, keyring style rings to place any small beads or odd-sized trinkets on the necklace. You may also have to get creative with some beading thread, ribbons or craft wire to attach certain beads or trinkets. Just keep in mind that it is supposed to be worn, so make sure that there are no sharp wires sticking out anywhere. Mom will be in enough pain from the labor contractions!

Emphasize on the invitation that the Birthing Necklace is meant to be worn during labor. I thought I had made that clear on my invitation, but our guests were surprised to learn that, yes, indeed, we were making an actual necklace to wear during labor. Some of them had brought some very well-intentioned pieces that just didn't work on a necklace – especially one to be worn during the thrashing about of child labor! Emphasis on the “necklace to be worn during labor” may help reduce the number of odd-shaped and cumbersome-sized pieces. If you do receive some odd trinkets, put them on the necklace anyway. You do not want to break the chain of positive energy!