Imagine after giving birth that someone came to your hospital room and offered you a cup of tea and some goodies.

Having given birth to two daughters, I know what my answer would have been: “Are you kidding? Come on in!”

And that’s in effect the answer patients on the 5th floor Birth Center and 4th floor Women’s Care Center at University of Colorado Hospital today routinely give to that question.

Since October of 2011, Kate Snapp, administrative assistant for Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), along with a few friendly and trusted FNS meal delivery employees, has been circulating a cart laden with tasty, high-quality teas, along with a variety of two-bite pastries, and serving them to tired, hungry new moms in elegant tea cups and trays every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.

The feedback, not surprisingly, has been overwhelmingly positive.

“Tea service is a wonderful experience for our patients,” reported Birth Center Nurse Manager Sherrie Williams, RN. “I have received nothing but positive comments.”

Fit to a tea. Snapp says she got the idea for the tea service at a New York gift show back in 2006, long before she started working at UCH. She thought the tea set, called Tea Forté (high tea in French) was such a great idea that she put a “bookmark in her head” to use it at a later date.

Fast forward to 2011. Snapp’s first task at UCH was to sift through several months of Press Ganey surveys – which the hospital uses to measure how satisfied patients are with their care and the service they receive – compile the results, and present them graphically.

“She started brainstorming on what she could do to enhance the patient’s experience – something that would not be too expensive or technical. She came up with the idea of serving tea.

“Every lady I know loves tea, the whole experience of it. That hot deliciousness in a beautiful cup and lovely little two- or three-bite pastries – not enough sugar to send you over the edge but just enough to make you feel good,” Snapp said.

She first presented her idea to FNS Director Victoria Franklin and the leadership team, who got on board, as did Sarah Kabat, director of international and executive health services. Next, Snapp made a full tea presentation to UCH President and CEO John Harney, a native New Yorker.
She got the answer she was looking for – and then some. “He said, ‘This looks like New York. This is beautiful. Yes to everything.’ It just tickled me. And I thought, ‘We have really got something.’”

The original plan was to have volunteers run the tea program five days a week. But when not enough volunteers materialized, Franklin and FNS Inpatient Services Manager Dave Snapp agreed to have FNS food delivery employees make the tea rounds three days a week.

“It’s an incentive, or bonus, for our top food delivery people,” explained Kate Snapp.

**Tea service.** On a recent Friday, sisters Joanah and Joyce Cruz and Kate set up their cart with 10 teas, which included a variety of caffeinated and herbal teas such as raspberry nectar, Bombay Chai, white ginger pear and citrus mint. (Snapp said the doctors approved the caffeine.) They also loaded on lemon bars, shortbread cookies, chocolate mousse topped with a fresh strawberry and mini chocolate éclairs.

They then headed upstairs and started knocking on doors of Birth Center rooms, asking new moms and their visitors if they wanted some tea and goodies. Most answers were in the affirmative.

New mom Zuzana and her husband enjoyed the Chai tea, mousse and cookies. Zuzana said she loved the presentation and thought it was a nice treat. “It doesn’t feel like a hospital,” she said.

Syreno, mom to newborn Ivan and three-year-old Daisy, enjoyed the raspberry tea while her daughter nibbled on a strawberry. “I like the smell and taste of fruit in my mouth. It tastes delicious,” Syreno said.

On this Friday FNS also planned to extend the service for the first time to parents and guests in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, a “really big deal,” Kate Snapp said. Prior to this, FNS staff had asked parents and their guests to come to the entry of the NICU to be served, but found that many parents didn’t want to leave their children.

Christy Math, MS, RNC-NIC, nurse manager of the NICU, said she was thrilled with the tea service but concerned about parents bringing food to the patient areas, which goes against NICU guidelines.

However, Kate Snapp got approval from Infection Control to serve the NICU parents and guests directly. She said she was looking forward to providing some comfort to these “parents in times of great stress and worry.”

“Her program stems from her sincere desire to do something for patients that will show care and concern,” said Math. “The tea service and delectable treats are truly world class and leave you feeling pampered.”

**Warming to the idea.** Kate Snapp says that not only have the Press Ganey scores for FNS gone up “monumentally,” the department has also been invited to make a presentation about the tea service this fall at a meeting of the University HealthSystem Consortium, the organization of academic medical centers.
Eventually, she would love to extend the program to five days a week in the Birth Center and Women’s Care Center, and to other units in the hospital, especially geriatrics.

“I think [the tea service program] really represents out-of-the-box thinking and collaboration between departments,” she said. “And I think that spirit of giving more than just a shot, of giving that comfort and care in the form of something beautiful and thoughtful, really goes a long way with not only our patients but their families.”