

Natural Childbirth FAQs by Kelli Karanovich

What is natural birth?

Natural labor/birth, occurs when a mother delivers her child vaginally without using an epidural or other commonly prescribed narcotic drugs to manage pain. It can happen at home, at a birthing center, or in a hospital with the assistance of either a midwife or traditional M.D. Some major medical conditions, such as a breech baby, make natural labor inadvisable. However, most labors, including those induced with oxytocin, can still be natural and free of narcotics if the mother insists that this is what she wants (and if she has a committed partner to encourage her and back up her choices).

Why consider natural birth?

In general, it makes both parents integral to the birthing process, and it leads to alert mamas and babies who suffer from less health problems than they would had they received an epidural. It reduces the risk of having a cesarean section, and it often brings a spiritual component to the birth experience. In my opinion, it also builds an appreciation for patience, faith, and surrender at the same time that it teaches mothers to accept and work with pain. I think these are valuable life lessons, especially for an expectant parent.

Why not take the drugs?

According to *The Thinking Woman's Guide to a Better Birth* by Henci Goer, hospitals must administer epidurals to around 80 percent of birthing mothers in order to cover the cost of employing round the clock anesthesiologists. As a result, glossing over the downsides of the epidural has become common practice. In some cases, it has even become customary to portray the epidural as being good for the mother because it relaxes them and supposedly places less strain on the baby as a result. Mothers who avoid the epidural are labeled "martyrs" and become ridiculed for supposedly endangering both their children and themselves.

In reality, there is no evidence that administering an epidural will cause a baby less stress. However, there is scientific data indicating that epidurals can cause babies harm even if their mothers report feeling relaxed. Specific side effects of the epidural that affect babies include: low heart rate, decreased oxygen supply, toxicity, permanent disability, and death. Side effects of the epidural that affect mothers include: infection, backache, respiratory arrest, heart attack, paralysis, and death. The most serious side effects are rare. However, risking them seems unnecessary when one considers that there is nothing inherently dangerous about a natural birth.

For more information about natural family living (and to enroll in my 8-week online natural childbirth class), please visit www.MamaKelli.com.