

## Why Have a Natural Childbirth?

by Dr. Sara Ohgushi

Q: With epidurals so readily available these days, why would anyone want to have a natural childbirth?

A: While there is a time and place for every intervention, in general one intervention in the natural, normal process of childbirth tends to lead to what has been called the “cascade of interventions”. The risks of epidurals can include depressing the mother’s blood pressure and/or the baby’s heartrate. Epidurals also can slow down labor (leading to the increased use of IV Pitocin to stimulate labor), greatly limit mobility by the mother (she’s stuck on the bed with two monitors around her belly, an IV in one arm and a blood pressure cuff on the other), and not uncommonly cause a mild fever in the mother which can lead to greater “work-up” (usually blood draws and possibly longer hospitalization) of the baby. Since the mom cannot feel her contractions she must be directed when to push, which makes pushing more difficult and leads to the increased use of vacuum extractors, forceps and cesarean sections. As “safe” as the anesthesiologists proclaim epidurals (and certainly they are safer than other medications which have more direct effects on the baby), there is nothing safer for almost all moms and babies than a natural childbirth.

The good news is, women’s bodies know exactly how to give birth. Millions of women have birthed before us over millions of years, and only recently were epidurals an option. This is not to say that it is easy; for most women it is not. Having given birth naturally myself twice and having attended births for nearly five years I can say that most women reach a point when they don’t think they can do it. However, this point is usually shortly before they DO do it, then experiencing an amazing sense of relief and getting the best prize of all: their baby! One analogy is climbing a mountain versus taking a helicopter to the top: the view is still great on top, but there is a significant difference. While a woman may have doubts during her labor, it is rare for a woman to wish she had NOT had a natural childbirth. Most women are empowered by their experience, in which they may have exceeded their personal limits. An exception might be the woman

who expects an epidural but is told it is too late: she may be lacking the mental preparation and the support of people around her to get through it positively.

The support of others is a very effective pain relieving measure. While the support of her partner is very important, he is often going through this process for the first time and it can be difficult for him to see his partner in pain. Studies have shown that the continuous support of a woman experienced in nonmedical labor support measures, often referred to as a “doula”, decreases medical interventions while increasing the woman’s satisfaction regarding her labor. Specifically, epidural use is reduced by 60%, Pitocin use by 40%, cesarean birth by 50%, and the length of labor is reduced by 25%. Doulas are often the constant during a labor which may involve a couple shifts of doctors and nurses, many of whom the woman has never met before. To learn more about doulas, visit the websites [www.dona.com](http://www.dona.com) and [DoulaSearch.com](http://DoulaSearch.com).

Midwife-attended homebirths are a safe, highly supportive, low interventive option for many low-risk women. There are several kinds of midwives in the U.S. with different kinds of training; you can find them in the yellow pages under “midwives”. As a Naturopathic Physician who has additional certification in Natural Childbirth, I provide full prenatal, birth and postpartum care to low-risk women, usually at homebirths but also sometimes at a birth center (I do not have hospital privileges). At home and in birth centers, birthing tubs are very helpful in coping with labor, and waterbirths are a lovely option. I also provide pediatric and women’s healthcare at my office. I occasionally act as a doula for women planning a hospital birth, particularly Japanese-speaking women. I am happy to meet at no charge with couples expecting a baby to discuss their various childbirth options.

Note: This article is not meant to substitute for direct medical advice. For more details, references to this article or questions, email Dr. Ohgushi at [sao@imagina.com](mailto:sao@imagina.com), or call her at 503-703-7825 to schedule a free 20 minute consultation. Dr. Ohgushi is licensed in Natural Childbirth and provides full prenatal, birth and postpartum services. As a Naturopathic Physician she also maintains a general family practice including pediatric care. OFFICE: 2304 E. Burnside, Suite 10, by appointment only.

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