



Guide to Natural Childbirth



Your life is our life's work.



How is it different from other childbirths?

Your choice of caregiver

Most hospital births involve an obstetrician (OB) delivering the baby and providing prenatal care. You may feel most comfortable with an already familiar OB. A physician who supports the natural birth philosophy can fulfill your wishes for a low intervention birth.

However, many women opt for a certified nurse midwife. These highly trained experts take a holistic approach to prenatal care, labor and delivery, turning to natural techniques before medications.

A certified nurse midwife must hold a Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN), or a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree. Nurse midwives take the place of an OB for prenatal visits, managing labor, catching the baby, and managing postpartum and newborn care. If complications arise, she works collaboratively with a physician.

Some expectant moms also choose to have a doula present for their baby's birth. The doula is a labor coach with non-medical training in helping mom have a safe, well-managed delivery. Doulas provide emotional support and comfort.

What is "natural" childbirth?

Natural childbirth promotes moms giving birth — and babies arriving — in the most natural way possible. This low-tech, high-touch option allows your baby to be born in his or her own time, without medicines to induce or speed labor. It also means you choose to labor without pain medication, following your body's cues to usher your baby into the world.

Typically with a natural birth, you decide:

- Do you want a midwife or OB/GYN for prenatal care and delivery? What about a doula during delivery?
- How many family members and friends will attend the birth?
- What labor and delivery positions would you prefer?
- What music, lighting and aromas do you want in the birth suite?

With natural childbirth you own the process.

What happens during labor and delivery is up to you, as long as you and your baby stay safe.



The safety of our patients and caregivers has been, and always will be, our priority. We follow strict standards for disinfecting, required masking for patients, visitors and co-workers, and social distancing.

Please do your part by following these and other CDC guidelines.



Mercy midwives all have Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) accreditation from the AMCB, hold advanced degrees and are members of Mercy's Obstetrics and Gynecology team.

What is a Midwife?

Midwives are specialists in the areas of pregnancy, childbirth, and women's reproductive health. Midwives in the United States have extensive training and receive accreditation and certification through licensed professional organizations such as the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB).

Midwives have been an indispensable part of childbirth for thousands of years. In addition to their medical training, they are also repositories of the ancient wisdom of the tradition of natural childbirth. They provide a "human touch" to childbirth, and many laboring women find them a calming and reassuring presence during the joyful but intense process of bringing a new life into the world.

Prenatal care

Good prenatal care is key to any pregnancy and delivery. When you plan for natural childbirth, you'll have regular prenatal visits like any other expectant mom. Your visits may look a little different, though. In addition to making sure the baby is developing normally, emphasis is placed on helping you prepare specifically for a natural birth. Your midwife can often spend more time with you during your visits to provide education and support.

Prenatal visits should cover:

- Proper nutrition and exercise for pregnancy.
- Preparation for labor, postpartum recovery, and early newborn care.
- Development of your birth plan — including support team, labor plans, movement, music, aromatherapy, lighting, photography, newborn care, etc.
- Labs and ultrasounds as needed to ensure the safety of you and your baby.

Also consider childbirth training classes to help you manage labor pain, especially if you have not previously had an unmedicated delivery.



Labor

With natural childbirth, labor begins and progresses on baby's schedule. You and your labor partner work with your body to respond to baby's cues, helping achieve a birth that's in biological harmony with you and your child.

It starts naturally. The World Health Organization has defined "normal birth" as "spontaneous in onset, low-risk at the start of labor and remaining so throughout labour and delivery. The infant is born spontaneously in the vertex position between 37 and 42 completed weeks of pregnancy. After birth mother and infant are in good condition."

During a natural childbirth, if labor is going too slowly, natural measures are taken to help move it along. In most cases, labor goes more quickly without induction. That's because your hormones are higher than they would be if you were induced with a medication like Pitocin®.

You can eat and drink. Studies show labor progresses better when mom eats. Having a baby is hard work. Food and drink provide the fuel your body needs. Restricting food and liquids can lead to dehydration and ketosis, and require the introduction of fluids through an IV.

Feel free to move around. Your baby will most likely be monitored through a Doppler device. You're able to leave the bed, move around your room, walk the halls or spend time in the kitchen and living areas. Many moms prefer to spend labor in the soothing waters of a whirlpool tub, if available.

Pain is managed naturally. Without medication, you are aware of your body's cues so you can respond to your baby as labor progresses. You use techniques such as breathing, water immersion and body positioning to help you through contractions. Squat, lie on your side, walk around, sit in a yoga sling...whatever works best for you.

Birth

While medicated moms are usually confined to the hospital bed for delivery, natural childbirth allows for a variety of delivery positions. Squatting or leaning on hands and knees may give you more strength to push.

A medicated hospital birth is usually attended by your doctor and at least two nurses. With natural birth, there may be a doctor or nurse midwife, one or two nurses, and a doula if you opt for one.

After an uncomplicated birth, baby goes immediately to mom's chest for skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding.

Postpartum

Natural birth moms will typically leave the hospital sooner than medicated birth moms. You may be able to return home with your baby within hours, as long as no complications arise.

Moms who opt for natural birth often find they've entered a passionate community of like-minded parents. Some birthing centers offer ongoing support to new moms through regular lactation circles with other nursing mothers, child care classes and more.

A normal — or natural birth — is not induced.

At times, a planned natural birth may become an induced birth for medical reasons.



Is natural childbirth safe for moms and babies?

Women have been giving birth naturally since Eve first became a mother. Natural childbirth is an instinctive, healthy part of life for someone who is low risk, as long as everything unfolds as expected during pregnancy and labor.

Some argue that natural childbirth is really safer for moms and babies, because every medical intervention introduces an additional risk. With proper preparation and education, natural childbirth can reduce the need for vacuum assisted births, C-sections and episiotomies.

If you are concerned about you or your baby being affected by medications given during labor, natural birth is a good option.

Who is a candidate for natural childbirth?

Most any woman can choose natural childbirth. Your age is not a factor, and neither is the size of your baby.

Talk with your doctor, other moms and a natural birth specialist to decide if this is the right choice for you and your child.

How can I learn more?

Ask a nurse midwife or your doctor about natural childbirth.



Additional Resources

<http://evidencebasedbirth.com/>

<http://www.birthtools.org/>

Maternity Care Working Party. *Making normal birth a reality: Consensus statement from the Maternity Care Working Party.*

Our shared views about the need to recognize, facilitate and audit normal birth. 2007. NCT/RCOG/RCM. Available at: [http://www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/related documents/Making Normal Birth A Reality-Normal Birth Consensus Statement.pdf](http://www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/related%20documents/Making%20Normal%20Birth%20A%20Reality-Normal%20Birth%20Consensus%20Statement.pdf)

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2014). Intrapartum care: care of healthy women and their babies during childbirth. NICE Clinical Guideline 190. UK: Center for Clinical Practice.

World Health Organization. (1996). *Care in Normal Birth: A Practical Guide.* Geneva: World Health Organization Department of Reproductive Health and Research.

World Health Organization. *The World Health Report: Make Every Mother and Child Count.* Geneva, Switzerland: WHO.

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