



Healthy  
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## Natural Childbirth: Pros And Cons

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Natural childbirth, birth, midwives, women, hospital, people, natural birth, obstetrician, pain, squats, natural, problem, experience, movement, breathing, drugs, labor, epidurals, plan, involved

00:00

Welcome to our session on natural childbirth. I'm Professor James Adams. And with me today is Karta Purkh Khalsa, who's a nutritionist, herbalist and yoga teacher, and also former director of the National Ayurvedic medicine, Medical Association. Karta. Thanks so much for joining us today.

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Hi, it's my pleasure to be here.

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Karta, can you tell us a little bit about your background and your experience with natural childbirth?

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Sure. Well, I've been involved with the natural healing field for 49 years. I started as a teenager way back in the hippy times and I've been continuing to do that my entire adult life. So I'm involved with nutritional therapies. So that's diet and supplements, herbal medicine, and yoga teacher, as you mentioned, and so my main focus is Aveda, and most well known as an



herbalist out there in the real world probably although since I have my fingers in many pies, it kind of depends. On how people have come across me, not the whole natural childbirth movement, of course, God. I mean, it's hard to, to say exactly when it got started. But 1940s were when a couple seminal books came out. And so by the time I got involved with this, it was definitely something that my peers were interested in. And of course, as a young adult, people were starting to have children. And so I was around a lot of natural childbirth. It was a part of the kinds of things that I would study. I'm not a midwife or a an obstetrician. My wife is a doula, however. So I've been involved in many different natural childbirth scenarios. I have three adult children, they were all born at home. So it's something that I've waded deeply in these waters over almost 50 years now.

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Great, great. So can you explain to us a little bit about what you mean by natural childbirth and what are some of the options for natural childbirth?

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Yeah, of course. The, the term natural childbirth is so broad as to be almost kind of, you know, misleading fundamentally, it just means that there are no drugs or other artificial methods or surgery involved. Most women who opt for a natural childbirth actually have that natural childbirth, in the hospital. And so they feel like they are most comfortable with having other medical procedures and devices available, if needed. Fundamentally, that's the definition but it also extends to birthing in alternative kinds of locations like a birth center, or even at home. So the idea is that we can combine the safety with the comfort of a home or birthing center and then allow the natural process of birth to just unfold in an unhurried manner. That's one of the main things that people in the natural childbirth movement focus on is that in a hospital, everybody has a schedule and The obstetrician can hang around forever and things need to get going. And so they induce labor. And you know, certainly people in this movement think that Syrians are done way too routinely and too quickly. So often if we just sort of let things unfold in this unhurried manner, you know, it works. So, the basis of the philosophy I think most midwives would say the same thing is that birth is a natural common occurrence. But it requires time, patience, strength and endurance, all things that human beings have and mothers have and people have been birthing children, women, for uncounted centuries. Now, the question then, is just what if there's a problem and we can get into a bit of discussion about that, but generally, people would say that if a woman is in good shape, and she's followed a sound nutritional plan throughout her pregnancy, and then when labor begins nine times out of 10, the body will just follow nature's plan and do the job it was meant to do. It's been happening forever. The idea that it's something thing that has to be artificially assisted is a very new idea. Women began to ask for drugs to treat the pain of labor in about the 1800s. And that spawned the whole modern movement of the anesthetized birth. And then the react the social reaction to that started in



about 1940. And by the time I got involved in late 60s, early 70s, the natural childbirth idea was a reaction to that. So rather than being anesthetized out of the experience, people were encouraged to participate in the experience. Now, we'll talk about the actual experience in a moment here, but especially midwives working outside of hospitals are inclined to avoid pain relieving medication. And in the hospital press as we know many women choose this as I was mentioning, but they know that the drugs are available and so they feel comfortable that if it just gets too rough for them a choice that women didn't have until 100 years ago. They, they like to know that those drugs are available. So statistically, again, most women choose for sort of a quazy natural birth. It's in a hospital type environment. So epidurals, for example, that are commonly given in hospitals to labouring women provide relief from labor pains, but from the woman's perspective and also distances her from the experience of the just the whole process. And then there is a very slight risk of permanent spinal injury with epidurals. It's quite small. And in fact, women who go through hospital assisted births generally do fine and like the experience and do well so it's not a black and white situation. We look at the status of natural childbirth today and how often it happens. Turns out that midwives attend about 6% of all births. So it's still a very tiny slice of the population. Really, and of those midwives attended births 95% occur in hospitals. 3% occur in birth centers and only 1% occur in private homes. So all my children were born in at home. But today, that's still a tiny percentage. So now as more and more midwives have privileges in hospitals, it's common in hospitals. The World Health Organization, though, tells us that up to about 95% of the entire world's births are normal. So we're seeking a sort of industrialized or medicalized solution to a problem that's only going to occur 5% of the time. Now 5% is not insignificant. And so you know, there are some very bad things that can happen. So we have to have a plan for that. There's midwives.

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Those are midwives who also have a nursing background and most of the midwives that practice in hospitals are nurse midwives. There's this area infection rate is about 11% compared to the national average is 23% so half of the national average and that's even in the hospital. So they're just not as inclined to, to pull the trigger on a cesarean. And often it turns out not to be necessary only half the time but it speeds things up and the doc and they'll get back to their to their schedule. Turns out about 40% of women who deliver Singleton's that's one baby at a time and they do it badly up not to have epidurals So, yeah, so this movement has definitely generated some interest over the past 80 years and you know, the 40% of women not having an epidural. That's, that's become, you know, pretty significant. And so the standard of just making sure that all women had some kind of anesthesia has definitely been chipped away at over the years. Sure,

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sure. So, thanks. It is very helpful discussion. Um, so you mentioned that one of the potential



advantages, advantages of natural childbirth is, in some cases, you could do it at home or just in other most cases in the hospital, but with a midwife there might be somewhat more patient, you're not in a rush, lower chance of having a C section. My wife has had three c sections, it takes quite a few weeks to get through this. So more rapid recovery is an advantage. Can you talk a little bit more about other advantages you mentioned not doing an epidural, you're more involved in the process, there will be more pain but you're also more involved.

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Well, that's right. And women can feel the pushing the sensation and it just feels more like their body is meant to do what what it was meant to do. On a psychological level. Many women find that natural birth is just empowering for them. They feel like they're much more in control of the process. Rather than sitting in a bed waiting for things to happen and sort of be medicalized. They do, usually there's a lot more room typically in a birth center and of course at home. So whenever often feel like they want to move around quite a bit change positions, try different possibilities. And then again, for from a more psychological perspective, many women feel like they're pushing against the paternalistic medical establishment. Now, I think that the whole area of Obstetrics has become a lot less paternalistic. We go back a generation ago, the obstetricians were all men. Now they're all women. So that I think is helpful for women. And you know, women themselves created this change over a course of a generation. Also, then there's no possibility of drug effects. The drugs that are used generally are relatively benign, and there's usually not a problem but still, there's some risk with any drug. And the natural childbirth option can allow them to avoid the routine IV labor induction routine, a PCR dummy, those are happening much less these days anyway, so that consciousness has changed but in a situation where it would be routine, sometimes These things are necessary. And then you have to have some plan for those. But continuous fetal monitoring, forceps, vacuum extraction, all those things are something that they all have potential side effects in one way or the other for the mother and the child. And even though those side effects are relatively rare, you can avoid them by natural childbirth. And most of those things are to allow for problems that are in fact never going to happen. And

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to speed up the process, as we discussed.

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Sure, sure. So one, one question I think many people have are, what are the potential risks of doing a natural childbirth. So can you talk a little bit about that?

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Yeah, well, statistically, women with normal uncomplicated low risk pregnancies that giving birth



outside a hospital are about as safe as hospital births. So there's there's not a whole lot of risk. It's only in extreme cases where there's very much a difference if we go all the way back to 1991 30 years ago, there was a study that compared physician assistants births with midwives, assistance births, and midwives actually had a 19% lower infant mortality rate. And that probably again goes back to the the reluctance to medicalize the whole process. Some of the things that are problems are things that happen from the surgery itself, or the forceps or a drug that was administered too early or improperly or something. So by avoiding those things, or at least saving those to the very last resort. There turns out at least in this study, there was a 19% lower mortality rate, the actual birth process is often not the cause of the things that go wrong. It's the medicalized procedure. So, as much of an advocate for natural birth as I am, I understand that the modern medical procedures are often life saving, and we have to have an opportunity to, you know, to use those. So if a woman is ways so far from the hospital that she has a crisis, she can't be transported, that's going to be a bit of a problem and should be considered as part of the process. There needs to be a very strong, very detailed plan that everybody's worked out and everybody's agreement.

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Okay, great. And then related to that, with some natural childbirth, about 12% or so of births, or preterm may involve pre labor. And so those, those infants may be at higher risk, they may need to go into a NICU. So if there's a pre term or pre labor occurring, then I think it would make more sense to do it in a hospital setting, but it could still be attempted in a natural childbirth way first, is that right?

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Well, that's right. And again, the difference between or the definition of natural childbirth is just that it's drugless and lacking medical procedures, it just happens in the normal human way. So that can be done in a hospital. So it's not the location that determines natural birth, obviously home births are going to be natural. But hospital births can still be natural but I agree preterm labor is requires, as you say, the NICU and things like that. So that should be part of the plan that what happens if a woman is having early labor? what's the what's the plan, where's the hospital who's on duty? I think it's also important for women to have an obstetrician who in fact, may really never actually be involved. Maybe the woman will have one or two visits with the obstetrician just to check in develop some rapport, that that person will be available if there's a crisis. It's disconcerting for women who think everything is going to be great. And I've talked to many of these women, they were ready to have a home birth. And something went wrong. It was things weren't progressing or something ended up in the hospital, and then they were being attended by an obstetrician who they'd never met before. Just somebody out of out of nowhere who happened to be available. And they found that to be bothersome. So I think having an obstetrician, even if the midwife is going to handle the whole pre birth process and the plan and



be there for labor starting and all that, and hopefully continue the whole process, good to have an obstetrician that the woman has rapport with, ready to go?

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Sure. I think that makes very good sense. I think also, as you pointed out that not including epidurals doesn't mean that you have to totally suffer through the pain. But could you talk a little bit about breathing approaches or other approaches that women can use to try to reduce the pain or better manage the pain?

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Yeah, very much. So there are

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natural birthing methods and in a moment we can talk about where people can find this information. But certainly breathing is one of them. Lamaze is a method probably just about everybody has heard of it. On every TV show about birth, and that's largely a breathing kind of situation there are I VEDA and yoga have techniques for breathing, also positioning. Again, this because of the natural child movement over the past eight years, a lot has changed over time. So women are not just, you know, in stirrups on a cold hard table anymore. They're usually in some kind of a comfortable hospital bed, but still things are contained. And they're expected to just sort of be in that in that position until things happen. But many women find that their pain is relieved considerably by different positions on hands and knees, squatting, you know, in every possible position and talk to women who really, really delivered in every possible position, but there are devices that women can use to hang from something or whatever. So those are all part of the process that helps with pain as well. So the Lamaze, the Bradley method those are both well known. There's a movement called hypno birthing, which again, goes all the way back to the author of the first book on in the last century on natural birth. And he suggested hypnosis from the very, from the very beginning. And so that's become more of a movement now that women practice hypnotic states with their therapist during the nine months pre partum. And then they naturally can be in that state. So they use hypnosis for the pain. So all those things are possible. And often they make a huge difference. And frankly, they might even it might even just be that they're distracting. It's hard to know whether the actual breathing itself reduces the pain or whether or not it's just concentrating on something else. Because when you're in that much pain, and it's just such an overwhelming event, it's hard to think of anything else and so any kind of distraction generally tends to be good. Those are some of the I mean,

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sure, sure. And we interviewed a physical therapist also who specializes in pelvic health and you had mentioned squatting. And she mentioned that people nowadays squat much less than



they used to. And so therefore, she recommends squatting exercises 10 squats several times a day or more, to try to build up the pelvic floor, and to give an easier birth. That also helps reduce vaginal tears during the birth process. So, again, I think that would fall under the category of natural childbirth techniques to help prepare the woman for birth, so she couldn't be in better shape. So there's a smoother easier birth.

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Yeah, very definitely. And in fact, most women around the world and birthing in the squatting position that ends up feeling almost natural and kind of working the best all the way around, but the physical therapists was right. The first time you've ever squatted in your life is in the delivery room. It's not going to work so well. So I completely support that 10 squats several times a day. Sounds Ideal. Yeah.

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Great, great. So how could a woman or couple decide if natural childbirth is the best option for them?

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Yeah, well,

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it's a matter of just doing the research and the research is very, very available. So I would recommend interviewing possible doctors and midwives. It's a very intimate experience. And it's an experience that generally goes very well although it takes a lot of energy and fortitude for it to happen. But it will women need to be comfortable with those around them. And so I very much recommend the women decide who's going to be around in advance and think it through very carefully so the sort of intrusive mother in law who wants to be there to be quote helpful, is you know, often not the person that the that the woman really wants there and just to consider her male partner is You really got to be able to stand to the environment, you know, what if it's, it ends up as a C section and he's stuck there in wearing a bunch of, you know, operate, operated gear. And all of a sudden, you know, his wife is being cut open. So I have to think through all those sorts of things. Sometimes a a doula or a best friend or someone else who can go to the childbirth classes are beneficial. So interviewing doctors and midwives and asking questions about previous clients, how many births have they attended, you don't want to be the first one or even at the top 10 probably somebody has to be in the top 10 I guess but you know, better not you their experiences with natural births and their cesarean rates, which vary drastically from almost nothing to you know, 50%. So then people can develop this insight into their approach. Otherwise, I'm going to recommend books by three authors who I think have somewhat different approaches but would give you kind of the spectrum of what natural



childbirth is all about. It may gaspin is one of them and very well known. She's came from the hippy days and still writes kind of from that perspective. But as attended, I'm sure thousands of births by now very much recognized as an expert. Another one is Robert Bradley, a medical doctor who founded the Bradley method that now goes back in what 60 years or something, but those books are still relevant. And then another modern author, Payne Simkin, who has written several books and was very much a leader in this movement and comes to it from a more kind of scientific and logical and medical perspective, but still very much an advocate of natural childbirth. Online. The American pregnancy Association has pretty good I don't really know much about their organization, but I checked out their website, it has pretty good information about all these various options. And there's a website called very well, very well as one word and it's a huge website just about healing within orientation toward natural healing. But they have a lot of great information about all the different kinds of childbirth and the pluses and minuses. And so that's a lot of good information to go through. And then of course, just most women of childbearing age have a bunch of friends who are also childbearing age, and they've looked it up. So talking with those people, it's really critical to be very well informed. And again, to do the things that are needed. One of the problems that I see is that women sort of have this sense that, look, it's a natural process, women have been giving birth in caves and fields since the dawn of humanity. It can't be that complicated. Then they get into it and realize that they're woefully underprepared. So I think over educating yourself as you know, is better and that means childbirth education. There are numerous classes, classes about natural childbirth where you go with someone and you Learn the things we've been talking about breathing and options and just have plenty of time to go through the whole thing. And then having qualified expert help, if that's a midwife, then what is the what are the midwives credentials? And frankly, in midwifery experience often counts for more than book learning. So I was involved in a project where American midwives were doing internships with where was this mean was anything someplace anyway, where the the, almost all births were home births and midwives, who were village midwives, and had experience of thousands of births and had learned from their mentors who were also midwives who have learned from their grandmothers all the way down, had far lower rates of complications than the American midwives who were practicing in a more medicalized system because they didn't have hospital transplants easily available and they come up with solutions for breech presentations or

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Pyrenean problems, you know, things like that. So also to have a very detailed birth plan. And that should be the more detailed, the better. What are we going to have in our go bag? What's the sign that we need to go? When do we call the midwife? Just everything What? What needs to happen at the hospital? You never know when you know that it's going to be the unexpected scenario. The plan for going to the hospital, catching a taxi on a busy street in New York City is not a birth plan. Having an actual You know, I've talked to many people where that happened,



you know, there's always a cab except, you know, so, and then I mentioned having an obstetrician ready to go may never use them but still valuable.

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Well, thanks, Karta. This is very helpful. I think it really will help stimulate thinking about women rose, they have a number of options, they can discuss these options with their physician with potential midwife and think about To what degree or To consider the many different options you mentioned. So thank you very much. Any other closing comments, or recommendations you'd like to give?

24:08

Well, we have a free gift for the audience. And this is a pre recorded webinar on fertility and conception so before the actual birth process, but things that people can do to enhance facility and fertility and facilitate conception. So you can just check out on your website or whatever the way you're going to administer these. We have that available and love to have you be able to do that just our gift to you. My website is internationalintegrative those two words all one word [internationalintegrative.com](http://internationalintegrative.com), a lot of material there, you can come to check out a wide variety of natural healing ideas.

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Great. Thank you very much.

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My pleasure.

