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## 13 Benefits of Natural Childbirth

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- Updated on October 19, 2018

Birth has gone from being a normal biological process to a **medicalized event**. **Epidurals, Pitocin, and IVs are the norm more often than not.**

It doesn't have to be this way...

And really, it shouldn't be this way for the health of baby and mama.

While medical interventions can and do save lives in a small percentage of births, the majority of labors can unfold as nature intended. As natural mamas, we need to take back this experience!

Natural birth is a tremendous rite of passage, but you just may be surprised at **how beneficial it is for baby and mama.**

Here are 13 benefits of having a natural childbirth.

## 1. Freedom during labor

Having an epidural, IVs or continuous electronic fetal monitoring (EFM) usually means you will be confined to bed, unable to walk or change positions when it would be beneficial to do so. Many moms don't realize that they'll be given a catheter once the epidural is administered so forget laboring on the toilet!

Natural childbirth allows you to move freely and work with your body to birth your baby. Freedom of movement makes labor easier, and sometimes faster. Women who walk and change position during labor **experience increased comfort, are more likely to give birth vaginally**, and have a better sense of control over their experience.

Freedom to eat and drink during labor is another way that natural childbirth helps women have easier births. A woman who is well nourished and hydrated is a strong woman ready for the hard work of labor.

## 2. Avoid the cascade of interventions

Each unnecessary intervention has the potential to lead to more interventions, including c-section. When birth begins on its own and continues on its own time, mom is less likely to need these interventions.

For example, if you have an epidural, labor is likely to slow which may mean that your doctor will give you Pitocin to push labor along. Likewise, if labor is induced and your body and baby weren't ready **you will not produce natural oxytocin to begin contractions**. You will then need Pitocin to get contractions going.

Pitocin has the potential to create intense and frequent contractions that don't allow mom or baby rest, which can reduce the oxygen supply to baby. If baby becomes distressed many doctors will recommend a C-section.

## 3. Avoid Cesarean

Natural childbirth reduces the risk of cesarean delivery. Simply *planning* a natural childbirth with trained professional midwives **reduces your risk of having a cesarean section from 30% to about 5%**. **Hiring a doula decreases your risk of a cesarean by 60-80%**. *(ROON&RICE believe that it should be possible for the Thai pregnant woman to plan a natural birth without being the victim of doctor's and nurse's authoritarian attitudes which immobilizes the pregnant woman, enhances the fear-tension-pain cycle, and get sufficient*

information before going to the labor room (weeks before). Now the information focuses on supplements, and breast feeding, but no information is given on how things go inside the labor room. Understaffing is frequently pointed at as a reason for this attitude, but if outside support is not permitted to enter to support, and if natural birth is avoided as being inconvenient, surely the lack of staff will be a result, as complications are sure to occur (costing more money, more staff, more medicine, and less empowerment of the laboring woman)

There have been a number of studies addressing whether epidurals cause higher risk of cesarean section and none have found a direct link.

Unfortunately, these studies are flawed because they compare epidural anesthesia to narcotic pain relief rather than unmedicated labor. However, we do know that epidurals increase the risk for forceps or vacuum assisted births, which *are* related to higher risk for C-section.

We also know that, though continuous electronic fetal monitoring (EFM) is not evidence based, even with high-risk moms, most OBs will require you to be continuously monitored while on an epidural (and in some other cases too). In a Cochrane review, continuous EFM was associated with an increase in pain medication use, cesarean sections and instrumental vaginal births including forceps and vacuum extraction.

## 4. Shorter, easier labor

In natural childbirth oxytocin signals the uterus to begin contracting and signals the brain to send endorphins,

nature's pain killer. It also signals the brain to continue sending oxytocin which will reach a peak during the pushing phase.

Epidurals interfere with this normal cascade of labor hormones and can slow labor significantly. Often Pitocin is recommended to get labor progressing.

When you have an epidural you can't feel your lower body so you can't change positions when it would be beneficial. Also, if you can't feel your contractions you can't push at the right time and with the right force to help baby out, resulting in a harder, longer labor.

## 5. Safer for baby

Epidural use can cause sudden blood pressure drop for mom which means less oxygen rich blood pumping to baby. This can result in fetal distress and many practitioners will recommend a C-section.

After an epidural, babies are less alert, less able to orient themselves, and have less organized movements for as long as **a month after birth**. Your body and the placenta help the baby to eliminate toxins while he is in your uterus. However, once he is born, his newborn liver will need to do it alone, which means it sometimes takes longer for babies to get rid of drugs and toxins in their system.

Narcotic pain relief medication can cause additional side effects in baby as well. These include:

- Central nervous system depression
- Respiratory depression

- Impaired early breastfeeding
- Altered neurological behavior
- Decreased ability to regulate body temperature

Because of these side effects, baby may need additional medications.

## 6. You're present during natural childbirth

Narcotic pain relief can cause mom and baby to be groggy and “out of it.” Forgoing this kind of pain relief will help you to stay present during the birth of your baby. Even epidural pain relief can make you feel disconnected from your child’s birth. Though the medication may not make you feel groggy, the lack of sensation and connection to the physical act of giving birth may make you feel disconnected from the experience. Some moms have to be told when to push because they can’t feel the urge. Moms may also have an epidural “hangover” or feel itchy as the result of the procedure.

Unmedicated, natural childbirth, on the other hand, requires your full attention. Some women describe it as “other worldly” because of the connection between mind and body that has to occur during birth. With the rush of natural endorphins, some moms even **enjoy** giving birth rather than just suffering through it.

## 7. Natural childbirth is empowering

Natural childbirth supports the idea that childbirth is a rite of passage. Because of the blood, sweat and tears that you put into birth, there is **something really transformational that happens**. Some like to say that you go into birth as a maiden and come out the other end as mother. Natural childbirth advocates know that this journey to motherhood is a necessary one. They know that it is empowering for a woman to give birth on her own terms. To make choices for herself and her baby without coercion, guilt and ridicule. **The mother needs to feel empowered and encourage as her birth unfolds.**

## 8. Better breastfeeding right after delivery

A sleepy baby doesn't breastfeed as well. The less he eats, the more sleepy he becomes and the less he will nurse. This can start off the nursing relationship with some bumps in the road. Pitocin can cause jaundice in some newborns, which makes babies lethargic and sleepy as well. Narcotic pain medication can also cause sleepiness in baby, while epidurals have been associated with **fewer successful breastfeeding relationships in the first 24 hours** though there was no reduction in breastfeeding attempts.

According to La Leche League International pain relievers or anesthesia can contribute to breastfeeding problems:

- The baby and/or mother may be sleepy or less alert and thus delay the first nursing.
- The baby's ability to suck, swallow, and breathe may be disorganized.
- The baby's rooting and sucking reflex may be delayed and depressed.

The most important time for establishing a breastfeeding relationship is in the **minutes and hours just after birth**. If mom and baby are sleepy, groggy or disoriented, they are much more likely to miss the opportunity to begin breastfeeding at the optimal time.

C-sections have also been associated with **difficulty in breastfeeding (mostly because of hospital protocol getting in the way)**, and also with **delayed onset of milk production due to the blunt in hormonal cascades that normally occur in natural birth**.

## 9. Quicker recovery

Without the haze of drugs or the soreness of surgery, moms who experience natural childbirth are able to recover quickly and be present right after birth. Moms experience an oxytocin high which gives them a boost of energy to cuddle their baby and begin skin-to-skin touching, breastfeeding and eye contact, which in turn enhances the oxytocin cascade. Many moms are up and walking around shortly after natural birth.

## 10. Natural childbirth improves healthy gut flora

Natural childbirth benefits babies in their gut. Gut bacteria plays an important role in building and sustaining a strong immune system and proper digestion. Vaginally birthed babies have more diverse gut flora that they acquire in the birth canal.

Research has shown that babies who are born via cesarean delivery have less diverse gut flora and are more likely to have harmful skin bacteria like Staph and Strep that is usually present on the skin. This may be that babies born via c-section don't come in contact with vaginal bacteria but instead gain their first colonization in the operating room from mom's skin or the skin of practitioners.

Breastfeeding is another way that baby develops a healthy gut, so breastfeeding becomes even more important after a cesarean delivery.

## 11. Decreases risk of adult illness

As we mentioned, gut health is vital to overall wellness. Early healthy gut flora seems to be key in teaching an infants immune system what to attack and what to allow, meaning that autoimmunity is learned early.

Recent research, published in the British Medical Journal, revealed that c-section babies are more likely to develop obesity, asthma, and type 1 diabetes when they get older.

We also know that C-section babies are hospitalized more often for asthma, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disorder, immune system defects, leukemia, and other tissue disorders during their lives. They also have a 20% higher risk of developing asthma and an approximately 40% greater risk of developing immune defects.

Though not directly linked to cesarean delivery, unhealthy gut flora has been linked to allergies, autoimmunity, vascular disease, some cancers, depression/anxiety, neurodegenerative disorders and type 2 diabetes, so it makes sense that early unhealthy gut flora could contribute to these diseases later in life.

All is not lost if a child has to be born via Cesarean. These medical interventions can save lives and are absolutely necessary in about 10% of births. A mother can optimize her surgery by electing for a Gentle Cesarean. This practice will help to boost the health of her newborn and create some of the positive benefits of a natural childbirth.

**SaveMama Natural**We know that natural childbirth has many healthy and safety benefits to mom and baby but did you know these surprising benefits? Find out in this post.**980Mama NaturalMama**

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## 12. Better brain development

A team of researchers found that natural childbirth triggers the release of a protein in a newborn's brain that improves brain development and function in adulthood. This protein (UCP2), which regulates behaviors related to memory, learning, spatial awareness and stress response, is released as the hippocampus is stimulated in the birth

canal. Alternately, The brains of cesarean babies may have impaired expression of the same protein.

Additionally, the protein help cells metabolize fat, which is a main component of breast milk, suggesting that triggering of the UCP2 protein through vaginal birth may help newborns transition to breastfeeding. Therefore, the lack of this protein may also contribute to cesarean babies and moms struggling more with breastfeeding.

## 13. Better fine motor and social skills

As if lower risk for blood transfusion, anemia and low blood volume weren't enough reason to demand delayed cord clamping, research has found that there is another, surprising benefit to this natural childbirth choice.

One study found that babies who experienced delayed cord clamping had better fine motor and social skills at age 4 than those that had early clamping. This was especially true for boys. Researchers speculate that girls are more protected by the high levels of estrogen in utero.

### Bonus Benefit: It's Cheaper!

With healthcare costs rising finding a way to save money isn't a bad idea. Natural birth is far less expensive than a birth that has many interventions. In the U.S., maternity care is not a package deal like it is in many other countries. Instead, women are charged a la carte for each procedure or test. An epidural alone

costs around \$1000 while a c-section can raise your bill by as much as \$20,000.

Giving birth at a birth center or at home is also much less expensive than giving birth naturally at a hospital. The fee for midwifery services ranges, based on location, from \$2000-\$4000 while the cost for a vaginal birth at a hospital ranges from \$10,000-\$15,000.

*(ROON&RICE estimate the yearly savings for the Thai Government at 7000 million Baht per year if a policy of pregnant woman empowerment was adopted, where natural active birth would become the standart. This saving does not include the cost of all the disease that commence after the first months of the baby, and will last for many years if not a life time. In this equation there are losers though. These are the producers and sellers of drugs, but also in terms of fee, the doctors involved will make less money per pregnant woman. Medicine producers (just like herbicide, pesticide producers that very often also make medicine) are financially very powerful, and one needs to be prepared for their resistance to any change in current practice.*

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## About the Author

Genevieve Howland is a childbirth educator and breastfeeding advocate. She is the bestselling author of *The Mama Natural Week-by-Week Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth* and creator of the [Mama Natural Birth Course](#). A mother of three, graduate of the University of Colorado, and [YouTuber](#) with over 75,000,000 views, she helps mothers and moms-to-be lead healthier and more natural lives.