

## **What is natural birth?**

A labour is considered natural when there is no medical intervention during the length of it (the following are considered medical interventions: labour induction, breaking of waters, using drugs to accelerate the process of it, anesthesia, use of forceps, caesarian section), the woman's body starts the labour by itself and ends up giving birth through the cervix in its own pace.

Officially, the World Health Organisation, gives the following definition: natural labour is the one that starts by itself in the time between the 37<sup>th</sup> week and the end of the 42<sup>nd</sup> week of pregnancy. From the beginning of it until the end of it we see no evident dangers. The baby is born with the head first and after the labour both the mother and the baby are in good condition. There should be a serious indication of trouble so that we intervene during the natural process of labour. (WHO – Care in Normal Birth: practical guide p.4)

We must stress the difference between normal birth and natural birth, since quite often there is confusion between those two terms. Normal is the birth during which the baby gets born through the mother's cervix (not caesarean section). Whereas natural, as we mentioned above, is the labour without any intervention. A normal birth can unfold as a natural one, provided the mother chooses to give birth following the call of nature, the same way all mammals give birth on earth. At private and public hospitals of our country, the normal births are not natural, apart from the rare exceptions of some gynecologists-obstetricians who see to it that the labour is natural.

## **Is natural birth suitable for me?**

If you have a healthy, without any serious complications, pregnancy, you yourself are healthy and you feel like you really want to experience the miracle of your child's birth, then natural labour is a wise choice for you. The woman's body is made to give birth, bring life forth. The proof of that is that the human race has lasted through the ages due to that ability of the woman's body. Trusting your body and being well informed about issues of labour will lead to the birth of a healthy baby through the route that nature itself will present to you.

## **Why give birth to my baby in a natural way?**

This is a question that almost all mothers to be are called to answer to themselves. Being informed and gathering information on issues of natural labour will help you choose the way you want to give birth. The advantages of natural birth are many and refer both to the physical and psychological aspects of the mother and the baby.

The following are considered as advantages:

- Active role of the mother in the labour (through walking, changing positions so that she is comfortable, etc)
- Dealing with the pain using natural methods (massage, hot water, changing positions)
- Certain procedures are skipped, such as shaving the area around the genitals or enema.
- Better control of your own body, getting used to the pain
- Less pain after the birth
- Quicker physical recovery
- No use of medicine whatsoever
- Avoiding unnecessary medical intervention
- Increase of your self confidence
- Greater bond between the mother and the baby
- Less chances of post natal depression
- Healthy, serene and more cooperative baby
- Successful breastfeeding
- The husband has more of an active role helping with the breathing techniques or doing massage.

A recent research done in Yale University claims that the process of the natural birth activates a deeper emotional bond between the mother and the baby, which has the result of a more prompt response of the mother to her baby's cry. According to the scientists, the hormone oxytocin that the mother secretes during labour, responsible for causing the womb contractions, is also considered responsible for the development of an affectionate relationship between the mother and her baby. What is more, the French obstetrician Frederick Leboyer, after many years of experience in natural birth has come to the following conclusion: "The more serene labour the baby has gone through the more serene adult he will become. The greatest number of our fears, worries and anxieties have their roots in how peaceful a way, without a rush, we were born.

### **How can I achieve a natural labour?**

Many women plan to give birth naturally. In order to achieve that goal, it is good to prepare yourselves during pregnancy. Following are some suggestions that will help you to increase the possibility of giving birth naturally:

- Make a birth plan, where you will write down your desires concerning the way you wish to give birth
- Choose carefully the person that will assist you in your labour, be it gynecologist-obstetrician or a midwife. Ask their opinion about natural birth. Make sure that he/she has the appropriate knowledge and ability in order to help you through your own unique labour. Show them your birth plan and if the answers are not satisfactory, search for someone else.

- Choose the place of your birth (clinique, hospital, home) and make sure your choices will be respected there
- Be informed about your birth choices through books, articles in magazines and on line, dvd with natural births, birth stories from other women who have given birth naturally.
- Learn to control the pain and the stress of labour using different techniques like yoga etc. The lessons of pain free labour that midwives deliver are also a good solution.
- Make sure that the people who surround you support your choice for natural birth.

### **What is true in our country concerning natural labour?**

The last decades, at the developed countries of the world, there is a dramatic change in viewing the traditional idea of labour as a natural phenomenon.. Although interventions such as ultra sound checks, amniocentesis, amnioscopesis, heart monitor (etc) had as an aim to reduce birth mortality and illness, they led to the development of medical obstetrics, which often results in the change of the natural procedure of the woman's body into a surgical act. Modern day obstetrics keep focusing on the role of the doctor and how he/she will control and take the lead role during the process of labour, forgetting that the labour is the private business of each woman, that no labour is the same as any other and therefore it can not be subject to routine procedures (like shaving the area of the genitals, enema etc) and the strict observation of a protocol , as it happens in hospitals and cliniques.

Of course we can't overlook the positive contribution of modern technology in dealing with problems which might come up during pregnancy and labour. There is though a vast difference between admitting the above and the routine interventions that take place in a naturally developing labour. In Athens there is a Center of Natural Birth, where midwives help you with your labour in a specially designed environment. In addition, there are some midwives and obstetricians that agree to a labour at home. For more information, contact us through e-mail ([info@birthchoices.gr](mailto:info@birthchoices.gr))