

Why a More Natural Birth?

A more natural birth has **many great benefits** to it. It means not using medical pain relief and avoiding unnecessary medical procedures. *This allows your body to do the work of birth as it was designed.* And as long as your pregnancy and your baby are healthy, a natural birth can prevent you from going through unnecessary interventions. Medical pain measures can often lead to several interventions and medical procedures.

Benefits of using **Natural Comfort Measures**

- They don't involve any drugs that can cause your baby to be drowsier and hinder immediate breastfeeding.
- They aren't risky for you to use.
- They do not lead to more interventions, such as IVs, a catheter, possible C-section, vacuum or forceps extraction, extra fetal monitoring, and more. *Most medical pain measures can lead to these interventions.*
- And they don't wear off because they don't involve medicine.

Drawbacks of using natural comfort measures

- They don't remove pain; they only lessen the sensation of it to help you to cope.
- There are a few that aren't supported at every hospital, so you'll need to know what your hospital allows. Your provider can help you find that out. You'll also likely have to bring some of your own items to the hospital to do the comfort measures you choose.

The Three Rs—Relaxation, Ritual, and Rhythm

1. **Relaxation:** This is the most important of the three "Rs" to remember. The opposite of relaxing is tensing. Relaxation helps your body release endorphins that are natural pain-relieving hormones. There are several things you can do to help yourself relax through a painful contraction, but *the most important thing is to be aware of it and tell your body not to tense when you feel the pain.*
2. **Ritual:** During labor, many women come up with rituals that help distract them from the pain and enable them to relax. For example, as they go through a contraction, some women will use breathing patterns, concentrate on a focal point, or rock side-to-side. You might begin a breathing pattern, and then as it peaks, you might use a repeated expression or change your breathing pattern. Some come up with an expression they repeat, such as "I can do this; I can do this; I can do this ..."
3. **Rhythm:** Rhythm is a repeated pattern of movement or sound. You'll notice that there is a rhythm to the comfort measures and rituals. The rocking or swaying of the body is to a woman's own rhythm. The breathing patterns are rhythmic. *Your rhythms will change as your pain levels change.*

Natural Comfort Measures

Massage and Counter Pressure - Gentle massage, such as soothing strokes, can close those nerve gates by flooding the body with such pleasant sensations that the brain is distracted from the painful ones. Intense deep massage causes the brain to release endorphins, which are your body's natural pain-relieving hormones. These endorphins help you perceive less pain from the contractions. It is also believed that massage decreases stress hormones and increases serotonin and dopamine in your brain, which are our body's feel-good chemicals. Massage and counter-pressure work similarly with labor.

Positions - Changing positions throughout labor can also be very helpful in minimizing pain and moving you through labor. *When you're in an upright position, your uterus can contract more strongly and efficiently, and help move your baby into a better position for birth.* Studies have shown that your pelvis becomes wider when you're squatting, kneeling, or on your hands and knees.

Hydrotherapy - *Hydrotherapy is the use of warm water, either in a shower or a tub, during labor.* Many hospitals today allow a woman to labor in a tub of warm water or in a warm shower.

Room Environment - You can change the feel of your room by bringing in softer lights, flameless candles, or by keeping the lights down low, softly playing music you love, reducing the number of people in your room, and bringing some essential oil in that you love, such as in a diffuser. ***This is YOUR birth experience, and you have a BIG say on how it goes.*** Create an environment that is *relaxing and pleasant.*

Support Person - Research has shown that women get through labor better and have fewer interventions when they have a support person with them. This could be your partner, a friend or family member, or a trained doula. Find your support person or persons and begin practicing with them so they know exactly how to help you. Some things to think about are:

- Have safe words that will let them know if you decide you need medical pain relief.
- Teach them how they can guide you back to your rhythms or rituals if you begin to panic. Let them know what things will get you back on track. This can help you avoid medical pain relief. They can give gentle encouragement by saying things like, "you're so close now to pushing, would you like to try a little longer?" Or "you're almost there, let's breathe together through this next contraction."
- Let them know the things you don't want. Such as who you don't want in the room, or maybe you don't want an IV started in the beginning. Or too much chit chat when labor gets tough. Or what type of massage won't feel good to you, such as rubbing your feet.

You can do this!

Having a baby is really a big deal! But ***you are in control.*** **YOU** get to decide on many of the things that happen in the delivery room and how you manage your pain. Learn and practice the three Rs so that you naturally fall into using them when you need them. Even if you're planning on an epidural, you may still need them before that happens. Have a plan for which natural comfort measures you want to use, practice them, and work with your support person so that they know how best to help you.

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