

Lesson Four: *BRAIN*

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

Alice Walker

Welcome back, Mom, to Lesson Four!

In Lesson Three, you learned about how a woman’s body is prepared to deliver a baby naturally, about natural labor, and the purpose pain serves in labor. There are many benefits to natural birth for both you and your baby, and these benefits may make it the right choice for you. You also learned several natural comfort techniques, such as:

- Focused breathing;
- A focal point;
- Visualization;
- Massage and counterpressure;
- Changing positions;
- Hydrotherapy; and
- A calm room environment.

It is common to feel overwhelmed and concerned in childbirth. You may be thinking:

- How will I remember all this information during labor?
- How will I know if I’m making the right decisions?
- What if something comes up that we didn’t discuss in our lessons?

You can rest assured that you have all the information needed to make the right informed decisions for yourself and your baby. The solution is the BRAIN Method.

The BRAIN Method

This easy-to-remember acronym will ensure that you are able to get all the information needed to give informed consent to any medication, procedure, or treatment that may arise during labor and delivery.

BRAIN stands for:

B—Benefits

R—Risks

A—Alternatives

I—Intuition

N—No, or Not Now

Let’s break it down.

Ask...

B

enefits

What are the benefits if I do this?
What are the benefits if I don't do this?

R

isks

What are the risks if I do this? What are the side effects?

A

lternatives

What are my other options? Are there more natural options?

I

ntuition

After weighing the risks and benefits, what is my gut telling me?

N

o or Not Now

What if we wait? How long can I wait? Do I have to sign a release?

Benefits

There is always a reason healthcare providers suggest a certain medication, procedure, or treatment. You should know why. You can ask:

1. What is the benefit of doing this?
2. What is the desired result?
3. What is the benefit of not doing this?

Example:

Scenario: Your contractions have stayed the same for several hours without much progress in dilation. Your water has not ruptured, and the medical staff has suggested manually breaking your water. You might ask, “What would be the benefits or desired outcome of performing this procedure?”

One benefit of releasing the fluid is that it will allow the baby’s head to put more pressure on the cervix, strengthening the contractions.

One benefit of not doing the procedure would be reducing the infection risk by keeping the bag of water intact for as long as possible.

Risks

There are risks with every medication, procedure, or treatment. Though many risks are rare or unlikely, knowing what could happen due to a suggested course of action is essential. For example, a mom would ask, “What are the risks to breaking the bag of water?”

One risk could be the potential for bacteria to enter the uterus and cause infection. More severe but less likely risks exist, such as the umbilical cord descending through the cervix before the baby’s head. If that happens, a cesarean birth would likely be required. A risk of not doing this procedure would be that contractions would remain the same, and labor progress stalled or prolonged. Understanding the risks will lead to the next letter, A, for Alternatives.

Alternatives

A mom can ask if she can try something less invasive before the suggested medication, procedure, or treatment. A few alternatives a mom can try to strengthen contractions are changing positions to help open the pelvis, walking, and using an upright posture to allow gravity to help the baby descend. And this brings us to the next letter, I, for Intuition.

Intuition

Intuition is also known as a gut feeling. A gut feeling combined with knowledge and information leads to an informed decision. Often during labor, decisions are not inherently right or wrong. But you may get a strong feeling that you should agree to or

decline a suggested medication, procedure, or treatment. You must weigh your Intuition with the other information you are gathering. In our scenario, if a mom strongly feels she wants a completely natural birth, her intuition may tell her to decline the breaking of water. On the other hand, if you're planning a natural birth but you are open to relatively safe, non-medicated procedures, you may feel like you should give this a try. And this brings us to our last letter, N, for No, or Not Now.

No, or Not Now

It might be worth it for you to take more time to think about the suggested intervention or to discuss it more with your support team. However, you need to know how much "time" is reasonable to take before deciding. Will the opportunity for the procedure expire? If you say no, will you have to sign a document stating you decided against medical advice? Finally, will saying no have little to no impact on your labor? In our scenario of breaking the water, you could take a generous amount of time to think this over. And there could be very little change in the outcome of the labor if you decline the procedure.

It is Important to Ask Questions!

Why is it important to ask questions? Why shouldn't moms just trust their medical team to make decisions for them without explanation? Realistically, in an emergency, there won't be much time to consider each of these questions exhaustively. Thankfully, emergencies don't happen often, and there is usually time to get answers for anything the provider proposes. Informed consent is essential.

Informed consent is the process of getting permission before conducting a healthcare intervention or research on a person or disclosing their information. A sense of control over what happens during birth is essential to your emotional and mental well-being during such a foundational time in your parenting journey. If given all the information you need, you can make decisions that lead to a wonderful and empowering birth experience. Nothing says, "I can be a mom," like deciding on the birth experience you want and being given the tools to achieve it. However, if you and your support team are not informed, there can be very negative consequences that you may hold on to for a very long time after birth.

Use the BRAIN Method sheet to practice asking for more information. Take it to your prenatal visits to gain more information on any questions you have.

Nurse's Note: Asking Questions and Getting Answers

Having a baby is the most vulnerable yet empowering time of a mother's life. Mothers know their bodies better than anyone else. If something does not feel right, the mother needs to advocate for herself by calling her healthcare provider. When questions arise, write them down, and do not be afraid to ask the questions at the next prenatal visit. Asking questions and getting answers can decrease the mother's anxiety. Mothers should feel empowered, confident, and ready to advocate for themselves and their baby. It's important to the healthcare team that the mother gets the experience and care they want and deserve.

In our next lesson, we will talk about:

1. Possible medical interventions; and
2. Medical pain relief options.

Don't forget to complete your homework before your next class.

Resources:

Jansen, Lauren, et al. "First Do No Harm: Interventions during Childbirth." The Journal of Perinatal Education, Springer Publishing Company, 2013, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3647734/.

