

Natural Childbirth Exercises

for the Best Birth Ever

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Exercises used by the Bradley Method®

Congratulations ... Now You Are Pregnant!

As you begin your pregnancy it is very exciting and almost unreal. It is so ever-present in your mind that it's hard to believe it doesn't show to anyone you pass on the street.

- You feel so new and different.
- You think about new philosophies of life.
- You become aware of the environment around you as totally changed.
- You find yourself communicating with the wee one that is growing within you.
- You find yourself gently caressing your tummy.

Some of the newness and change is somewhat unpleasant. Things bother you that have never bothered you before—the creak of the bathroom door can be screamingly irritating. Your husband's unexpected love pat makes you cry. (“It hurt,” you say, wondering why you are crying.) You feel “left out” at work when you are not invited to join a group for lunch, a group that you never wanted to join in the past.

You find that your pending “mommyhood” has introduced a new vocabulary, one that used to amuse you when others used it. You discover things about your body that you never knew—where did those breasts come

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from—and those cravings—and your reaction to certain smells? And yes, you silently enjoy that tenderness you feel toward your spouse/partner in the creation of what will be in your arms within a few months.

Are you nodding your head? Do you know what I'm saying? Perhaps you were the rare exception and escaped this normal but weird experience of early pregnancy. I have to tell you, I was shocked when I first became pregnant. Newly married for two months, I didn't envision nor want a baby so early in our relationship. My husband, Richard, was just fine with it. I had to get my head around it ... after all ... I had only known and loved the man for three months!

Welcome to the wide-world of hormonal changes during pregnancy.

You have so many things to think about with this new situation in your life called pregnancy. Suddenly you are faced with all sorts of new things. What should you eat to be sure the baby is healthy? What changes will have to be made in your home? Will you have to move? Perhaps a two-year-old has to be moved out of a crib. How will you make your wardrobe accommodate your expanding tummy? Will you have to quit your job? Can you manage on one salary? No matter what, your life will be changed forever.

By now you will have experienced the strange phenomena that your pregnancy creates in others. Everyone is an expert and has advice to offer. The mailman, the boss, the shoe salesperson, your parents, the woman next door, the grocery shopper behind you as you checkout at the supermarket. They all have tales to tell. Reactions vary from "How lovely" to "Poor little thing," or even, "There are enough children in the world already."

You collect old wives' tales and folk medicine everywhere you go. You'll get some good advice, too, but sorting it all out is the problem.

In the Beginning

You will have days of elation and excitement and you will have bad days. You may even have day-after-day of nausea or (I hope not) of vomiting. I will talk more on this subject later. Ideally, you and your husband or partner can maintain good communication throughout this time in your pregnancy. It's vital to you both. Never have you needed a sounding board more, and never has your need for reassurance been greater.

You are normal and healthy and want to have this baby. Say so. A close, loving relationship is so important to the role of parenting. Sharing your love for each other with your baby increases the amount of love, it does not decrease it. It will enrich your life. It will make the relationship with each other bigger and wider as you expand to include another family member. But you are not sure of that yet and it's okay to be a bit worried about sharing your life with another person. The worry will be gone when you hold your baby in your arms.

Your sex life may change, too. Your spouse should know that he is not being punished or rewarded, depending on which direction your needs take. Talk with him about the changes in you. You may not get to understand yourself any better, but at least your spouse will learn that you don't know what's going on any more than he does. The most important thing for your relationship is to keep talking and listening to each other.

Stop and think of all the variations in your life because you conceived. Loosen up, relax, take a deep breath, and stop being so hard on yourself. Accept your pregnancy and allow yourself some limitations. Don't try to pretend that you are exactly the same person you were two or three months ago. You aren't.

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At the same time, don't try to accept it all in one big swallow. It's always hard for the female; we have to accept motherhood in a matter of a week or two, whereas the father can take nine months to grasp his role. Every one of us has gone through the whole gamut of emotions. We each do it our own way.

Now let's get back to that initial response to your pregnant state—excitement! That seems to be the prevailing and overriding emotion that surpasses all the other reactions and keeps you going.

I am making the assumption that since you are reading *Natural Childbirth Exercises*, you are interested in experiencing *Natural Childbirth*. That's wonderful news.

What is Natural Childbirth?

- ✦ Natural Childbirth is, well, natural.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is having a baby without drugs.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is taking responsibility for your childbirth experience.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is preparing your body for an athletic event called Birth.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is having this baby the way you want even if it means going against cultural norms.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is making the decision that this is your body, your baby and no one knows better than you what is right for you during the 9 months of pregnancy and during the birth of your baby.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is a choice that you and your spouse/partner make and share together.
- ✦ Natural Childbirth is a preparation of body, mind and spirit for giving birth and raising a child to become a successful adult.

- ♦ Natural Childbirth is the most exciting, exhilarating, joyful, amazing event in your whole life. There is nothing that compares to it. Do not let anyone take this incredible life experience from you.
- ♦ Natural Childbirth is accepting that you know what is best for you during your pregnancy and birth and that you are the expert. You will gladly take advice from the professionals but the decisions will be yours to make.

When you tell others that you plan on having “Natural Childbirth,” you will encounter a variety of attitudes. Most of you already have firm ideas about how you want to have a baby but once you commit yourself to it, you will need to be able to defend what you are doing.

Many people will say, “You are so brave.”

I am not brave enough to have a baby any other way! How can anyone be brave enough to give up total responsibility for the birth of her baby? Yet for years it was accepted practice that the doctor would, “Take care of you.”

“Leave it all to me; I know what’s best for you; trust me,” was commonly heard when women gave birth prior to the 1950s.

It was a myth. It is still a myth. You are the one who knows what is best for you. You will need to have some teaching and skill-training because we have not been included or involved when our mothers and sisters and friends were giving birth. Do not count solely on instinct because our brains are better developed than that. We are able to learn from one another.

Natural Childbirth is a sharing of birth experiences with one another.

(No one can have your baby for you.
No one but you can make it easy for you.
Trust yourself and your body.
Do this for the sake of your baby.
Do this for yourself.)

You must accept this as your responsibility. You *will* have this baby. You *will* prepare your body to give birth, and you *will* understand what is happening in your body to be able to work with the birth rather than against it.

Birth is a natural process. There is a natural opening in your body which allows the birth of the baby. Your body is designed for this process. You are not sick or ill or abnormal when pregnant. You are in a normal, natural, healthy state of pregnancy.

We enjoy a society that takes the precaution of hospital deliveries so that most of the complications associated with childbirth can be safely cared for by medical expertise. But that does not mean that you should be subjected to medical methods when you can give birth with joy, love, and lots of plain, honest hard work. It may even be easy, but don't count on that!

Explain, when you are asked, that we are using *educated* childbirth rather than *medicated* childbirth. You must prepare very carefully so that you will understand what your body is doing as you give birth and you will be able to work with the forces of birth. This makes for ease—not disease. Pregnancy and birth are not abnormal, unnatural, diseased states of your life, but rather, normal and natural—and we hope to add the ease.

The term, Natural Childbirth has many connotations in people’s minds. You will get all types of reactions from people as you declare your intentions to have a natural birth.

Some consider it primitive—true Natural Childbirth is educated.

Some think it is an endurance test—true Bradley Natural Childbirth is good preparation.

Some think of it as training for the type of anesthesia your doctor will use—true Natural Childbirth uses absolutely no drugs or medication unless complications arise. When medication is necessary, you are in a medical situation. You are no longer in control of your birth.

Some think of it as a home delivery with no skilled medical person to “get in the way”—true Natural Childbirth is a birth with a health care provider who has good support from the whole medical community whether at home or in a birth center or in a hospital.

Some think it is not making use of the medical expertise that has been developed over the years—true Natural Childbirth is based on the newest scientific evidence that any anesthetic drug given prior to the birth of the baby does get into the baby’s system, yes, even a local, and any dosage which will be effective for the mother is a huge overdose for her infant. How scary is that!

Some say that Natural Childbirth is unsafe—yet the very basis for Natural Childbirth is the decreased risk from anesthesia and unnecessary medical intervention for both mother and baby. It is the only safe way to protect the health of both. As a secondary benefit, it has turned out to be the most pleasant way to have a baby.

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Some may say that Natural Childbirth causes great guilt and disappointment in those who do require anesthesia—true Natural Childbirth creates satisfied parents who did their best. Certainly it's disappointing to need a Caesarean section or to have some complication requiring the use of forceps and therefore, anesthesia, or to have your doctor prescribe an anesthetic for medical reasons. As long as each woman is consulted and included in the decision and given the medical reasoning that was used by the doctor, why would there be guilt?

A mother-to-be must be convinced that her doctor has her best interests in mind and that he did not “put one over on her.” Then there is never a problem.

The burden is on the health care provider to use anesthesia only when necessary, to reassure the parents of the need for anesthesia when used, and to make sure the doctor has the complete trust of the parents. Surely that is not asking too much of our medical community!

Unfortunately, you will have to make sure that you do not choose a doctor who wants to use all the medical tools available. Some feel like they are a failure if *you* are able to have a natural birth with no drugs or medical intervention. Find a healthcare provider who supports *you*.

Natural Childbirth is a practical approach to having a baby which trains the woman and her partner for their roles in labor. The doctor supports the parents in labor and uses medical intervention only in those rare cases when it is necessary. All three work together as a team. The doctor is the lifeguard, the father or partner the coach, and the mother does the work!

Your First Big Decision

One of the biggest decisions you must make is to choose a healthcare professional that will be your guide, cheerleader and attendant for the birth of your baby. You want to choose one that wants for you the birth that you want to have. Interview at least three providers before selecting one. Whether you use a physician, midwife, or other healthcare provider, it will be your choice.

By the way, I will interchange the terms health care provider, midwife and doctor for ease of communicating with you throughout *Natural Childbirth Exercises*. Because I did have a doctor, it may be my most common term.

Interviewing a professional takes courage and a willingness to be comfortable to admit your lack of knowledge of the subject. You need to ask a lot of questions even when you think the questions are stupid. The way you are treated by the Health Care Provider will tell you a great deal about whether that is the right choice for you. This is a very important decision in your life and you do need to prepare carefully.

Questions you need to ask include:

- ✦ What is the established routine of prenatal care?
- ✦ What type of preparation for childbirth is offered?
- ✦ What is the protocol regarding medications?
- ✦ What type of support will be offered to you in labor?
- ✦ Who will be expected and allowed to stay with you during your labor?
- ✦ What is the attitude to your needs and wishes regarding the childbirth experience?
- ✦ Has the professional had experience with Natural Childbirth?
- ✦ Does he/she have any negativity toward this?

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Your husband or partner can be of much help in making your desires known to the doctor and in assessing the situation. Be prepared with your idea of the perfect birth. Keep a list and discuss it together before you meet and interview your prospective health care provider. In most cases, you'll have a choice of health care providers, so do a bit of "shopping," then choose the one who best meets your expectations. If you have only one choice (such as living in a community with just one doctor who delivers babies), then proceed very slowly and cautiously, even deviously, to get your own way. One of my doctor friends told me that you must seduce to get your way, not attack. Know what you want and expect to get it but don't be abusive about it.

For help in techniques of interviewing your medical provider, you need to become educated yourself. It is one thing to ask dumb questions but quite another to actually choose not to find out the answers. Being pregnant and choosing to remain ignorant is not good for you or your baby. There are many ways of doing this. Much of it will be from reading everything you can. Read, read, and read! Talk to anyone who has had the experience of a natural birth. Check my website, www.NaturalChildbirthExercises.com for resources and references. I list books, websites and organizations that I consider helpful and will update them as needed.

All this adds up to the fact that you will have nine months of explaining what you plan to do in the name of Natural Childbirth. There may even be some large gaps in definition of Natural Childbirth between you and your doctor. Begin early to choose them so that your labor can be as relaxed as possible. Husbands/partners are essential in helping create good communication with your doctor. Ask positively, but do not demand, lest you nip all progress in the bud.

Getting on Schedule

Your health care provider will have a schedule of routine appointments for check-ups for you during your pregnancy. These are important. So little seems to be accomplished that you may have the urge to skip some but really, much information is recorded at these appointments. Small changes in you—especially in blood pressure, rapid weight gain and swelling—need to be noted so possible problems are prevented.

There are large volumes of statistics which prove the health and life of mothers and babies are vastly improved with good prenatal care. Allow the medical professionals to use their skill in preventing problems that will complicate your pregnancy. Do this for your baby's wellbeing and your own.

Let me add a word about asking your very busy doctor/midwife questions. I have found it helpful if I have a businesslike list of questions for my visit to the health care provider's office. It will facilitate things for all of you. Don't overdo and have three pages full. Write down the responses you get, it's easy to forget once you leave the office. The doctor knows your problems have been answered and you go home with a good feeling of satisfaction. Build a friendly but serious relationship with your doctor. If you can't manage that, then you are working with the wrong professional. Look for and hire another.

Old wives' tales can be a bother at this time of early pregnancy because with all that unsolicited advice you are getting, you don't know what to believe. Here are a few examples:

“Never raise your hands over your head.”

“You mustn't hold in your tummy.”

“If your nose grows, you're going to have a girl.”

“If you have morning sickness, you're going to have a boy.”

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“If you have heartburn, the baby will have lots of hair.”

“If you feel ugly and awkward, you’ll have a girl.”

“If you feel pretty, you’ll have a boy.”

“If the hair on your legs grows more slowly in pregnancy, it’s a girl.”

The list is endless ... and ridiculous!

If you feel troubled about whether or not they are nonsense, do ask your doctor. Remember, we are not very far out of the Victorian era when pregnant females did not even go out in public. Imagine the angst today’s pregnant woman would have created in those times with her baby-bump openly displayed in form-fitting clothes or wearing a bikini.

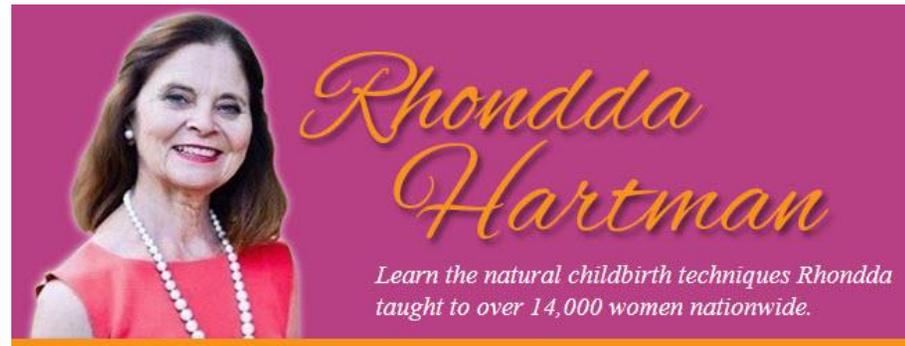
Some old wives’ tales are based on shreds of outdated fact, but most of them you can ignore—especially all the ones I’ve listed above.

Rhonda's Tip

The wise mom-to-be will surround herself with people and information about Natural Childbirth. Dismiss old wives’ tales and explore in your community where Affiliated Bradley Method® instructors offer classes. You can find them by going to www.BradleyBirth.com or searching the internet for Bradley Method instructors in your city.

About the Author

Rhondda Evans Hartman grew up in southern Alberta, Canada where she was a Public Health Nurse before becoming a homemaker and mother. She moved to Colorado after marrying Denver Attorney, Richard E. Hartman in Switzerland while vacationing in Europe. They created five amazing children who have produced nine incredible grandchildren.



She earned her B.S. from the University of Alberta, where she was Vice President of the Student Council in her senior year. She completed her R.N. at the University of Alberta Hospital, School of Nursing in Edmonton, Alberta and headed the Lacombe Unit for Public Health Nursing in Alberta. Many years later after all her children were in school, she earned a Master of Arts Degree in Urban Sociology from the University of Colorado in Denver.

For 25 years, she taught classes and trained and supervised other teachers in husband-coached childbirth for Dr. Robert A. Bradley in his Obstetrical Medical Practice in Denver, Colorado. Rhondda is on the Advisory Board of the American Academy of Husband Coached Childbirth, The Bradley Method. She is Charter Member and past president of La Leche League of Colorado and was a meeting leader for many years. Rhondda and Dr. Bradley were frequent speakers at national Natural Childbirth conferences. As an expert on natural childbirth exercises, Rhondda has been a guest on national TV in both the United States and Canada.

Rhondda is the author of Natural Childbirth Exercises for the Best Birth Ever, Natural Childbirth Exercise Essentials, and Exercises for True Natural Childbirth; she is also a contributor to the Five Standards for Safe Childbearing by David Stewart, PhD. and Compulsory Hospitalization or Freedom of Choice in Childbirth? by Stewart and Stewart, editors.

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