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Health & Fitness

Birthing a Better Way: 12 Secrets for Natural Childbirth
Christiane Northrup
Kalena Cook
Margaret Christensen
University of North Texas Press
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Midwife Mara Black says, “Women seem to be compassionate in labor. They don’t want to be too noisy, they’re self-conscious—excusing themselves and being apologetic. Sometimes it is hard for them to receive care.” A mother’s fear or self-consciousness can slow down labor, increasing the likelihood that she’ll need medical intervention later on. The solution is to be informed and self-aware, so that when the time for birth comes, the mother is empowered and ready to cope with the process of giving birth. *Birthing a Better Way* offers stories, techniques, and vital information for the mother interested in natural childbirth. Drawing from a diverse population of women from all cultures and walks of life, *Birthing a Better Way* makes natural birth seem accessible without excluding the possibility of medical intervention.

Focusing on positive thinking, authors Kalena Cook and Dr. Margaret Christensen reiterate the basics about natural childbirth. “Women have been giving birth for thousands of years,” they remind the reader. “Natural birth is not just for athletes, but ordinary women like you.” Deciding to have a birth with no medical interventions (such as a C-section, unless it’s an emergency) or medications (such as an epidural or opiates) seems radical these days. But, Cook and Christensen remind the reader, the benefits of working with a midwife and letting birth happen at its own pace can be a wonderful experience—one that gives the mother the feeling of control, and of being involved in the decisions that happen during her labor. *Birthing a Better Way* favors following instinctive cues during birth. It cites research that home and natural birth is better for the mother and infant, and provides non-drug “comfort measures” like hot baths and changing labor positions to ease contractions.

For mothers interested in hospital birth, or who plan on working with an obstetrician instead of a midwife, *Birthing a Better Way* may strike a holier-than-thou chord. The book

discusses the debate about childbirth and patients' rights, including choices about circumcision, breastfeeding, and post-labor care. While most mothers, regardless of their personal beliefs, will probably enjoy reading all the positive birth stories and affirmations, the reiteration that doctors are unhelpful during labor may be jarring and lose the confidence of the reader. Finally, though it offers plenty of solid information, the book includes a troubling chapter on Native American birth rituals. Readers may be turned off by Cook's 'Noble Savage' approach to Native traditions, which mars an otherwise helpful and well thought-out book.

A resource for the mother interested in alternatives to hospital birthing, *Birthing a Better Way* offers reassurance, friendly wisdom, and ways to make birth happen the natural way.

Claire Rudy Foster