

The Epidural Epidemic

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Epidurals during birthing have become so routine, as mothers are being convinced that pain during labor is unnatural. Convinced that they should not endure pain during the birth process, mothers are set up to believe in a drug instead of their bodies' own natural capabilities. Sixty four percent of certified nurse midwives reported concern over the increased number of their clients who desire epidural anesthesia, and a majority of certified nurse-midwives surveyed (53%) reported a negative attitude towards the increased use of epidurals.¹

We started including questions about births years ago on our children's case history and 9 times out of 10, mothers will check off that they had a "natural childbirth" and in the next question, they check off that they had an epidural. In other words, if they delivered vaginally, and their eyes were open, they are being led to believe that they delivered naturally.

What is not being provided to the parents is the increased complications which are a result of epidural usage. The PDR² cautions that "local anesthesia rapidly crosses the placenta...and when used for epidural blocks, anesthesia can cause varying degrees of maternal, fetal and neonatal toxicity." It continues, "this toxicity can result in the following side effects: hypotension, urinary retention, fecal and urinary incontinence, paralysis of lower extremities, loss of feeling in the limbs, headache, backache, septic meningitis, slowing of labor, increased need for forceps and vacuum deliveries, cranial nerve palsies, allergic reactions, respiratory depression, nausea, vomiting and seizures." Many of these side effects result in multiple complications. For example, maternal hypotension causes bradycardia (decreased heart rate) in the fetus. This altered heart rate can lead to fetal distress and operative deliveries.³ This has led doctors to warn, "a high concentration of anesthetics and epinephrine should be avoided, as they may influence labor."

Things To Know About Epidurals

1. Causes longer labors with slower progress.^{5 6}
2. Can cause fevers in mothers during childbirth.⁷
3. Increases use of pitocin by as much as 3 ½ times, which causes slow and irregular contractions.^{5 8}
4. Increases use of antibiotics in your baby by as much as 4 times.⁴
5. Increases use of forceps by as much as 4½ - 20 times.⁵
6. Causes neonatal jaundice due to altered red blood cells.⁹
7. Increases the incidence of birth trauma due to the use of mechanically assisted deliveries.^{10 11}
8. Causes adverse behavioral effects of the neonate.¹²

In order to bring about a reversal in epidural usage, mothers must become educated not only on its potential side effects, but on their bodies' own ability to give birth naturally. The overwhelming fear associated with birth has become a learned behavior in our culture. Fear causes additional muscular tension in the body, resulting in decreased blood supply to organs and therefore impaired uterine function. It is our privilege and obligation as Chiropractors to care for these women throughout their pregnancies, offering them encouragement and educating them about choices for their upcoming experience. I have been told by many chiropractors (and have heard it in our own practice) how women look forward to their visit with us because we treat the process of pregnancy with respect, and we enhance the mothers confidence in her own innate abilities.

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