

LINE ON LIFE

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Childbirth Variations

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There are various alternatives to standard childbirth. What are they? Are they available in Yuma? If so, where?

In 1993, Yuma Regional Medical Center (YRMC) built the Yuma Regional Maternal Child Center. It has 23 **birthing rooms** — admission, delivery, recovery and discharge will all take place in one room. (Technically, they are called **LDRD (Labor, Delivery, Recovery and Discharge) rooms**. With birthing rooms in most hospitals, the mother is transferred to another hospital room after delivery.) If special equipment is needed for the birth, typically it will be brought into the room. In case of rare emergencies (cesarean section or C-section), the mother will be brought into an adjacent surgery room. The mother may have whomever she chooses in the birthing room, although the optimal number is no more than 2-3 persons. If a cesarean section is necessary, the father may accompany the mother into the operating room. After the birth, typically the baby will room-in with the mother, until both are discharged.

**Even with childbirth, there are options available.
Consider them wisely.**

Natural Childbirth

Natural childbirth (also called prepared, trained, cooperative or controlled) was first advocated by an English physician, Grantly Dick-Read, in his 1932 book, *Childbirth without Fear*. He believed that pain in labor was primarily due to fear during labor. By educating women about birth and showing them how to help the process, this would help to reduce the fear and minimize their pain. (My reason for writing these articles follows his philosophy.)

Lamaze Method

The most popular form of natural childbirth is the Lamaze ("lah-MAHZ") method. This method originated in Russia. (Yes, Russia did it first!) It was introduced into the Western world in 1951 by a French physician, Fernand Lamaze. As with all natural childbirth, the Lamaze method educates the mother on what to expect and do before, during and after childbirth.

At YRMC, six-week childbirth classes are offered in both English and Spanish. Mothers and their coaches (usually the expectant fathers) attend two-hour sessions at YRMC once a week. There they learn the signs and stages of labor. They practice exercises to strengthen the woman's abdomen before labor and practice what they will do during

labor. More specifically, the expectant mother learns how to relax, breathe and push at appropriate times. The coach learns how to provide emotional support and how to encourage the mother in what she must do. The coach also learns how to massage the mother to help her relax.

In addition, three-hour refresher childbirth classes are held for mothers in subsequent pregnancies. There is also a breast-feeding class in both English and Spanish. Sibling classes are available to prepare children ages 2-12 for the arrival of the baby. There is even a class that teaches about caring for newborns.

Leboyer Method

In his 1975 book, *Birth without Violence*, the French physician, Frederick Leboyer ("leh-BOY-ur") indicated that the birth process was traumatic. However, in contrast to natural childbirth, Leboyer was concerned with reducing the *baby's* pain and trauma. Rather than bright lights, harsh sounds and a whack on the bottom, Leboyer recommends that the baby be born into a quiet, dimly lit room. The newborn should be placed on its mother's abdomen and massaged until it starts breathing. The placenta is cut. To further reduce the "*shock of separation*," the baby is given a warm bath and gently caressed, before it is returned to the mother.

With the Leboyer method, babies do seem happier and healthier. However, we don't know if this is due to the method itself — or the child-rearing attitudes of the type of parents that choose this method. Although this method is not currently used in Yuma, some physicians would do it if requested.

Midwifery

For those women whose pregnancy is **low risk** — progressing normally with no anticipated complications — midwives are an acceptable option. Midwives are women with specific training in childbirth. In Yuma, there are now at least seven Certified Nurse Midwives, RNs who have advanced training as midwives. Although they do not do home births, they are associated with the various offices listed below. For those who cannot afford care and lack insurance, prenatal care and delivery can be provided on a sliding scale. For more information, call:

* Associates for Women's Health, **341-4650**

* Sunset Women's Medical Group, **726-5950**

* Women's Health Specialists, **783-3050**.

Expectant parents should discuss the options that are available with their physician or midwife. Things you may want to consider in making your choice include the pain and anxiety involved, the amount of training required, the degree of parental responsibility in the birthing, the effects on the baby, and the cost. The choices may be difficult, but it is worthwhile to consider *all* the options available to you.

