There are few things harder for a childbirth educator to watch than a couple who tried desperately to achieve a natural birth have it slip through their fingers. How do well-prepared people sometimes end up with a birth very different than the one they planned?

There are many answers to that question, but one that I and many other childbirth educators have seen play out over and over again goes something like this: The mother works hard during her pregnancy, reading, exercising, eating well, learning to relax and understand the labor process. Ideally, her partner works right alongside her in this journey and they grow closer together as they anticipate the birth of their precious baby.

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The long-anticipated labor finally begins! Mom starts laboring. But the contractions are harder than she anticipated. She feels them in her back and the contractions are irregular. Some last more than a minute, others for just a few seconds.

After laboring for hours on their own, the couple heads to their birth place. Mom is not very diluted despite hours and hours of what felt like hard labor. Mom is getting tired. The pain in her back keeps intensifying and nothing seems to help. Eventually the exhaustion and pain cause Mom and Dad to opt for pain relief via an epidural. The epidural is placed and Mom is confined to her bed. The labor goes on. The baby won’t descend. Heart tones become non-reassuring. Mom is often diagnosed as either failure to progress or with cephalopelvic disproportion (CPD).

After hours of work and extreme fatigue, the baby is born via cesarean section.

The parents are glad for a healthy baby but are confused and wondering why their birth didn’t turn out the way they had planned.

What causes a labor to proceed in such a manner? The answer, often, is as simple as positioning. As anybody intimately acquainted with labor and birth knows, the baby’s position can be just as important as the mother’s. Yet sometimes all the education, preparation and exercise in the world will not ensure a properly positioned baby if the mother is not receiving good chiropractic care.

Chiropractic is often the missing link when it comes to natural birth preparation.

As a childbirth instructor, I taught for some time before I realized the importance of chiropractic as a key ingredient—an ingredient which is frequently left out of good childbirth classes. But finally it seems as though the wisdom of whole-body healthcare and the necessity of a balanced spine and pelvis in healthy birth is becoming accepted for what it is: an integral part of birth preparation.
I love chiropractic and teach it in my classes. (I am even married to a chiropractor!) But I wanted to share more than just my experience with you today. I have collected many testimonials from women with varied stories. Listen to what they have to say about the benefits of chiropractic care in pregnancy, labor and birth.

The Chiropractor’s Role

Often the realization of the importance of chiropractic comes when we see the difference it makes in our own pregnancy in reducing pain and increasing comfort.

Countless women share stories like these:

“Five months into my third pregnancy I experienced back pain so severe that I had to go to the ER. The doctors shrugged their shoulders and told me to rest. The spasms made walking impossible. The pain was beyond anything I had experienced, and I had given birth twice! Pain medication was not an option. My mom had me call our family chiropractor, Ken Oikawa, first thing the next day. In two weeks I had no pain and a much better understanding of how to take care of my back in pregnancy.”

— Cori Gentry, Salinas, CA

For Cori, chiropractic care helped her have a more enjoyable and healthy pregnancy. Of course, chiropractic can do so much more during pregnancy than eliminate unnecessary pain. It can also have a deep and lasting impact on the emotional health of the woman. A pregnant woman who is in excruciating pain or overwhelmed with fears regarding her body’s ability to function is not just experiencing physical symptoms; she is experiencing emotional stress as well. Those who understand the impact of the mind-body connection know that this is no laughing matter.

This woman’s story is a testament to that:
“There are so many things that chiropractic care can help with or outright fix. I had an SI sprain that caused me to limp around like a sad whale in the last trimester. My chiropractor soon set me on the path to recovery, and was able to tell me why it happened and how to prevent further injury. A good chiropractor understands the body as a whole in a more intimate way than most medical doctors who specialize or focus on illness. The multitude of changes in your body cause stress, no matter how stress-free your life. Chiropractic care helps regulate and calm the stresses of pregnancy. A chiropractor friend of mine says if you’re going to be adjusted twice in your life, it should be right before and shortly after you give birth. I would add that chiropractic care along the way helps prevent problems and added body stress in pregnancy.”

—Lauren McClain, Bowie, MD

Think what a difference would be made in maternity care if every pregnant woman simply enjoyed her pregnancy more because of chiropractic care. Shazia, a first-time mom who had the natural birth she had prepared for, credits her skilled chiropractor for more than just pain relief, but for a fabulous labor as well.

“Before I started seeing my chiropractor, Dr. Kristen, I could barely walk and was in so much pain. By the end of my pregnancy, not only could I walk pain-free, but I felt amazing! In addition, I know that routine chiropractic care contributed to my fast, complication-free labor. I can’t imagine going through pregnancy and birth without chiropractic care. One of the best things I received from my childbirth educator was the referral to an amazing chiropractor!”

—Shazia Lackey, Dallas, TX

Of course, chiropractic care can help eliminate pain, but another thing that you quickly realize when working with birthing women is that chiropractic can help labor to simply proceed normally. A labor that stops and starts or just won’t get going can be caused by a subluxated mother and a baby that can’t get into an optimal position because of it. Megan’s story is a great example of this:

“I have seen chiropractors all my life, so when I got pregnant, naturally I continued care. Despite that, I still had pain for seven months until I switched to a Webster-certified chiropractor. My tailbone was jutting into my birth canal. My new chiropractor fixed this seven-month-long
problem in two visits. She also stimulated a two-week-long prodromal labor into active labor and adjusted me in labor. I am absolutely certain I would have had a C-section for obstructed birth and baby malposition if not for her."

—Meghan Hughes, Fort Worth, TX

Regular chiropractic care should be an integral part of maternity care for every pregnant woman to improve both physical and emotional health.

Special Situations

Chiropractic is valuable for every pregnant woman, but for women with unique situations such as malpositioned babies or previous cesarean section, chiropractic can mean the difference between a vaginal and a surgical birth. A true gift that some particularly dedicated chiropractors give their patients is the option of receiving a chiropractic adjustment while they are in labor. This is something that many teachers encourage their students to look for in a chiropractor because it can be so beneficial. Jen says:

“My opinion on chiropractic care during pregnancy is that it is essential. You wouldn’t drive a car if it was out of alignment, so why would you prepare for birth that way? I would attribute how smooth my labor and delivery was to the chiropractic care I received during my pregnancy and labor. Thanks again to Dr. Dodge for coming to our house while I was in labor! My daughter’s head was tilted inside and it was slowing down my labor; he adjusted me and we headed to the birth center. Korie arrived soon after.”

—Jenn Lovett, Irving, TX

While the importance of chiropractic for every pregnant woman is starting to be appreciated, others, especially midwives, have long realized that chiropractic has a particular place of importance in encouraging a breech baby to turn. I asked Lauren McClain to talk about this. As a woman who had a cesarean section for a footling breech baby and as founder of
MyBreechBaby.org, she is passionate about both breech birth options and ways to avoid breech, when possible.

“These problems [subluxation] can cause misalignment of the uterine area that can encourage a baby to be malpositioned,” says McClain. “The most extreme of these is breech presentation, where the baby is butt- or feet-down. Luckily, chiropractic care by an experienced doctor can also help a good majority of butt-down babies turn head-down through the Webster technique. This technique is both safe and powerful. Everything in your body is connected, and in pregnancy that includes your baby. Your body most definitely affects your baby’s body. So get your body in line!”

In a typical hospital situation, a woman with a breech baby is given only one choice: C-section.

The prevalence of cesarean section in the current obstetric climate has become so widespread that it has gained the attention of national news syndicates and has even garnered a statement from the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). In 2010, ACOG issued less-restrictive policies for women seeking a vaginal birth following a cesarean, but most women still find great difficulty in attaining the birth they desire. As an educator, I know that a woman attempting a vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) in a pro-cesarean environment will require extra care and effort. The following woman had a natural birth after two cesareans and reveals how chiropractic helped make her VBAC a reality.

“As a VBA2C mom, there are so many things that can rise against you. I saw my chiropractor throughout my pregnancy, and my persistently acynclitic daughter’s position was corrected. After some prodromal labor, I left the chiropractor’s office and had my baby two and a half hours later. It was great that with all I faced, my stress was reduced, due to my chiropractor’s role in my life. As an instructor, I love to explain the benefits to moms who are dealing with pressure and pain. When a woman puts so much effort into a wonderful birth, chiropractic is one more amazing tool in your birth box!”

—Tara Quinn, Alvarado, TX

As an educator, there are few things as triumphant as a woman having a healthy, natural birth when the odds are against her. We must give women the knowledge and care they need so
they are well-armed for any birth that comes their way.

Chiropractic and Childbirth Education

It seems obvious that a skilled chiropractor can have a phenomenal impact on pregnancy, labor and birth. Despite this fact, few childbirth educators are talking about chiropractic as a way to ensure a better birth. This, however, is starting to change. I asked Donna Ryan, founder and president of Birth Boot Camp, why she included chiropractic in every 10-week series she and her instructors teach. Her answer is powerful.

“I have seen, literally, dozens of women helped by Webster-certified chiropractors during their pregnancies and labors,” says Ryan. “I have worked as a childbirth educator since 2003, but it wasn't until I met Kristen Hosaka, D.C., a Webster-certified chiropractor, in 2009, that I really learned about the benefits of chiropractic care during pregnancy, labor and the postpartum period. She has been a regular guest speaker in my childbirth classes ever since! My couples are having more comfortable pregnancies, babies in better positions, and good birth experiences.”

Donna had seen how chiropractic improved the births of hundreds of her students. As she developed her own natural childbirth education curriculum, she included chiropractors as an important part of the birth team. “When I was writing the Birth Boot Camp curriculum, there was never any doubt that chiropractic would be a part of the program,” she says. “When we refer to the birth team, it encompasses the midwife, doula and chiropractor! Couples who take the classes online have the privilege of hearing from Dr. Hosaka and witness her adjusting a pregnant woman. Couples that take live classes will often have the opportunity to hear from a Webster-certified chiropractor when he or she visits as a guest speaker.”

Getting the chance to meet, talk with, and watch a skilled chiropractor work is a powerful part of Birth Boot Camp classes. Many pregnant women fear chiropractic, especially during pregnancy. Meeting with a doctor of chiropractic and seeing him or her in action is a powerful teaching
The Growing Role of Chiropractic in Childbirth Education

Written by Sarah Clark
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Technique and is part of the reason the students feel so comfortable seeking chiropractic care. Claire Dodge, another Birth Boot Camp instructor, has also noticed the positive change that chiropractic can bring to her students' births, both physically and emotionally.

“Chiropractic care throughout pregnancy, by a skilled doctor trained in Webster technique, makes a world of difference in a woman’s experience of pregnancy and birth,” says Dodge. “The common aches and pains of pregnancy are resolved, and the baby is typically able to choose an optimal position for birth. The families in my classes who chose to incorporate chiropractic care into their prenatal care have visibly happier, healthier pregnancies. Evidence has shown that women under chiropractic care report easier births, shorter labor times, and lower rates of interventions. I am always happy for families that chose to add in chiropractic care, because it often significantly impacts their pregnancy and birth experience for the better.”

When you work with pregnant women who desire a natural birth, you will quickly come to understand the importance of chiropractic in achieving their goals. With all the other information and knowledge we share with birthing women, it makes sense to include the role of chiropractic as an aid in optimal birth.

Those who care for birthing women don't just want them to survive the birth process. We want women and families to have a healthy and enjoyable pregnancy. We want these families to have a glorious and triumphant birth. We want birth to be experienced as it is meant to be: full of joy and power. Chiropractic is an essential part of not just birth, but childbirth education, and it has the ability to change birth as we know it.