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# What is Lamaze?

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The Lamaze method is a popular **childbirth approach** that teaches expecting parents strategies for **handling pain during labor**, potentially reducing unnecessary **medical intervention**.

The Lamaze method is America's oldest, most popular childbirth preparation technique, becoming popular in the late 1950s and named after French obstetrician Dr. Fernand Lamaze. Dr. Lamaze embraced a new philosophy regarding **childbirth**, moving away from the standard practice where the mother was anesthetized before delivery, while the father remained in the waiting room. Instead, Dr. Lamaze approached childbirth as a **shared event between both parents** where the mother would remain awake and "breathe through" her contractions to raise her **level of pain tolerance**.

Reaching widespread popularity in the 1970s, Dr. Lamaze's method taught that being distracted from labor pain could reduce a woman's perception of it. Of course, Lamaze **cannot make labor painless**, but for many women, it **becomes less painful**, simply by reducing the focus on the intensity of their contractions and instead concentrating on things like **breathing techniques**, movements and positions during labor, using a dedicated focal point, and massage.

Focused, controlled breathing encourages relaxation and reduces anxiety. An anxious, laboring woman might typically react to the stress of childbirth with constricted blood flow and tight, shallow breathing. With Lamaze breathing, those constricted blood vessels can open to encourage circulation and increased oxygen, which **helps the labor process along**. The chances of needing additional **medical intervention** or procedures can also be reduced if a woman who is about to deliver feels more relaxed and in control of herself and her environment.

Women interested in learning about the Lamaze method **can take classes** that last 5-6 weeks. Trained educators typically review breathing and **massage**, position and **movement** during labor, general labor education, and specific relaxation skills.

For those considering Lamaze, it's a good idea to have a partner or coach learn the techniques as well. Having an **informed support system** to coach through the progressive stages of labor may be very helpful to the mom-to-be.

*Reviewed by Jennifer Lincoln, March 2020*

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## Takeaways

- The Lamaze method is America's most popular childbirth preparation technique.
- It was developed in the 1950s by French obstetrician Dr. Fernand Lamaze.
- The practice of Lamaze during birth can lower chances of needing medical intervention.