

# Why can't normal birth be the norm?

By [Caren Fairweather](#)  
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Watching the film "The Business of Being Born" for the fourth time, I got just as choked up as the first time I saw it. I will always be awed by the profound intelligence of the human female body and the mystery of our bodies as a life-giving force.

During birthing, the bodies of mothers and babies are naturally flooded with oxytocin, the substance responsible for feelings of being in love. Birthing is the ultimate mysterious everyday miracle.

Just as mysterious is the fact that between 1 in 3 and 1 in 2 babies born in the United States do not come into this world by normal vaginal delivery.

As surgical deliveries have increased, so has the number of preterm and late preterm babies, many requiring lengthy hospital stays and many sustaining lifelong disabilities that may have been prevented had they stayed inside the womb for just a few weeks longer.

Compared with all other nations in the developed world, the U.S. ranks second worst when it comes to infant mortality, an unfortunate statistic that is linked to prematurity.

## New York's poor report card

Nov. 17 is Prematurity Awareness Day. The March of Dimes raises awareness of the ever-increasing preterm birth rate by issuing a report card state by state. So far, no state has received an A. Only Vermont scored a B.

And New York state was rated a D. How can we do better? What role do birthing women play?

The well-known French obstetrician Michel Odent is quoted in the film, "Women are afraid of birth because they do not have an image of what birth is like." He goes on to ask, "What are the basic needs of a woman in labor?" To which he answers, "Give power back to the woman."

In the U.S., most of us never witness a normal birth. We emphasize becoming pregnant and being pregnant. We focus on preparing a space for the new baby and acquiring infant care items. Most pregnant women have never learned about or given any thought to the birthing part of pregnancy until late in the pregnancy, or at the onset of labor.

## Learn what to expect in childbirth

Knowledge is power. If you are planning to have children some day, are pregnant today or are planning to be pregnant again after a less-than-optimal birthing experience, learn about the anatomy and physiology of birth. If you cannot attend a live birth, watch a film such as "The Business of Being Born" or other films shown in childbirth education classes. Many excellent childbirth educators offer classes in our region. As soon as you confirm pregnancy, interview several to find an instructor with whom you feel comfortable.

Ask your health-care provider questions about her or his practice and the facilities where he or she delivers babies. If you choose a home birth assisted by a midwife, find out where you will go if interventions are necessary.

Knowing what to expect will increase your chances of experiencing the transformational power of normal birthing.

Caren Fairweather is executive director of Maternal-Infant Services Network of Orange, Sullivan and Ulster Counties, a mid-Hudson not-for-profit organization dedicated to family and community health and wellness. Visit MISN at [www.misn-ny.org](http://www.misn-ny.org) or at [www.facebook.com/MISN.NY](https://www.facebook.com/MISN.NY), or call 800-453-4666.