

MAIL TODAY

Many expectant mothers are actually opting for the easier way out — a C-section

by Preetha Nair

WHY labour when there's an easy way out — for delivering a baby, that is? Caesarean seems to be the natural option for many mothers who feel their pain threshold is too low to put up with the rigours of childbirth. They'd much rather go under the knife, it seems.

And so Nottingham University's associate professor in midwifery, Dr Denis Walsh, got a resounding boo from Delhi moms when he urged women to grin and bear the pain of childbirth in a recent article. He added that it only prepared them for motherhood and increased mother-child bonding. Recounting her experience, Bishaka Sen, mother of two, both delivered through C-section says, "How can a man understand the pain of a contraction or the desperation of a woman during labour? It's not what happens in the labour room that determines the bond between a mother and a child — that gets established the day a woman gets pregnant."

And figure this one out. An Indian Council of Medical Research study, conducted last year, says 25 per cent of babies in India are delivered through C-sections and 18 per cent of the surgeries are elective. The Delhi figures are predictably higher: C-section is almost as high as 65 per cent in some private hospitals. Lovelene Nadir, gynecologist, Fortis Le Femme, says, "There has been at least a 25 per cent rise in the number of women opting for Caesareans in the last few years in Delhi. They don't want to go through pain."

Like all expectant mothers, Suparna Mittal, 30, also had done her background research on the

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DR RICH KATYAR, ROCKLAND HOSPITAL

process of delivery and delivered both her kids through a C-section after hearing horrifying accounts from her friends and relatives. Fortunately, her husband and doctor backed her. "I heard so much about the pain, I was quite sure from the beginning that I want a C-section," says Mittal. Besides fear of pain, many opt for a C-section while seeking auspicious delivery timings for good horoscopes. "This too is a new trend — once they decide on a C-section, they fix an auspicious time," says Dr Nadir. Despite pre-natal aids like yoga and breathing techniques to prepare an expectant mother for natural delivery, sedentary lifestyles and lack of an adequate support system at home make women opt for a Caesarean.

"Some mothers are stubborn. Since, unsolicited advice comes from the moment one gets pregnant, some are confused and frightened. There's at least a 10 per cent increase in the number of women opting for C-section in our hospital," says Dr Richa Katyar, gynecologist, Rockland Hospital.

PUSH VS PULL

But doctors are quick to explain that Caesarean come with a number of risks such as, permanent scars, infection, haemorrhage and internal hernia. "The recovery rate is much faster in normal deliveries and as a doctor, I would prefer natural delivery," says Dr Nadir. Late pregnancy is also a deciding factor. Dr Anuradha Kapur,



Deliver us from PAIN



'There's a 50 per cent rise in such deliveries'

DR ANURADHA KAPUR, MAX HOSPITAL, SAKET

want to go through all that pain. They say you need it to become a complete mother — that's rubbish. Since there are ways to avoid the pain, I think women should use it. I took epidural because I didn't want to torture myself," says the mother of two.

For Bose's friend, Tanisha it's the push syndrome that haunts her all date. "I had a normal delivery. But the word 'push' kept reverberating in my head so much that I started hating the word." Tanisha now advises to-be-moms to think before they go in for the push.

THE NAYSAYERS

Not many traditionalists are likely to be swayed by her though. All those who believe there is no gain without pain, approve of Dr Walsh's criticism of C-section. "I wanted a natural birth and I tried everything to enjoy the process. I joined pre-birth classes, practised yoga and other techniques. It really helped me to have a peaceful delivery. I completely agree with Dr Walsh. The pain makes the experience memorable and leads to a stronger bond with the baby," says Sara Mathew, mother of six-year-old Tejas Mathew. And there are others who believe that C-section is nothing but a ploy by hospitals to jack up medical bills and rake moolah. While a number of expectant mothers may want quick solutions, Simran Pandey wasn't one of them. "I was ready for a normal delivery and I had prepared myself for the pain ahead. I even took yoga classes and was fighting fit, but my gynaecologist just walked for an hour and wheeled me for a Caesarean. And then I received a fat bill," says Simran Pandey, without naming the hospital. Rejecting the claim, Dr Nadir says, "I charge the same for a normal delivery or a C-section — no doctor will put her patient at risk for money."

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Max Hospital, Saket, says, "We've seen a 50 per cent increase in the number of women opting to go under the knife in the last two to three years. I advise normal delivery, but once they make up their mind, there is no going back."

Pitching for alternative methods like water birthing, Nadir says she discourages women who are adamant about C-section by explaining the complications. "Ninety per cent of them follow my advice. C-section is an option only when the woman needs assistance or if the baby is in distress," says Nadir.

And talking about doctors not following their own advice, Faridabad-based gynecologist Dr Sulekha Mehta (name changed) opted for a Caesarean too. "After delivering babies day in and day out and hearing women yelling, I decided to have a Caesarean. The child will never care if he was normal or Caesarean born. The pleasure lies in seeing and hold-

ing your baby," she says.

Meanwhile in the West, most women opting for natural delivery receive epidural injections or spinal anaesthesia for a painless experience — but India hasn't quite caught up with that trend. "I didn't opt for epidural because I wasn't sure of the repercussions. My Caesareans were comfortable and I never faced the problems everyone talks about. I was up on my feet on the third day," says Mittal.

As of now very few opt for epidural anaesthesia since not many hospitals here have the expertise. "The awareness of epidural anaesthesia is limited — besides, it comes at a price of about Rs 10,000. Epidural also has a few complications. Since the mother is free of pain, she might not push the baby out — so the baby will have to be taken out with forceps. That can be traumatic for both baby and mother," adds Dr Katyar.

SOME MYTHS

Popular belief has it that women have a higher pain threshold than men so as to be able to cope with the agony of childbirth. However, a research by the International Association for the Study of Pain rubbishes such beliefs. It says that various hormones in a woman's system make her more susceptible to pain. But she's borne the pain of childbirth for centuries without complaint. Does she have a choice considering the number of popular prejudices stacked against women opting for a Caesarean? "Have you ever seen a Bollywood hero born from a Caesarean? Every time they show a hero's birth, there is lightning and rain, temple bells ring and a poor woman screams her guts out," says painter Ami Bose, who believes that romanticising childbirth is a major factor in women taking the painful path. "Even the media and doctors are inducing guilt pangs in women who don't