

To me, natural does matter and I think of it from two perspectives. As a practitioner a flyer for a supplement caught my eye. The heading read “Natural pain relief from two natural sources” and went on to talk about ‘naturally produced endorphins’, ‘a natural reaction’ and ‘a natural pain-killer’. Was that over-playing the ‘natural’ card? Is the word natural becoming one of the most overused words in the English language? As a practitioner I’ve called my college Natural Healthcare College, so I’m as guilty as everyone else of potentially overusing the word.

In my day-to-day life I’m lucky, living in Devon on the edge of the Dartmoor National Park I see natural all around me. There’s the source of our natural spring, the pet sheep displaying their natural instincts, the abundance of bees busily carrying out their vital roles as our natural pollinators, and the endangered fritillary butterflies who know the violets and bugle are a natural source of food for both larvae and adults.

However, as today’s talks are coming from an ‘informed’ group of people, I felt it would be interesting to investigate the meaning of natural and its relevance in the day-to-day lives of a cross section of our community. Time doesn’t allow us to talk about all the responses so we’ll look at just one and I’m now going to ask you to do something that isn’t at all natural, in fact it’s rather super-natural, and that’s to join me in a ‘virtual’ live interview with a young family. They live not far from this part of London, in the area where I grew up.

So please join me now as we’re just approaching the home of Tracy and Jason Smith. Tracy is 21 years old and Jason, he’s also 21. We’re nearly there, it’s just round the next corner. Oh, it’s not quite what I expected with the natural-sounding name Sycamore Heights, in fact it’s a block of flats and oh, naturally the lift isn’t working. Still Mother Nature endowed me with legs that work so we’ll have to climb the stairs. Here we are, 6th Floor, and that’s number 69 over there. I hope they’ve remembered we’re coming. Thank goodness, someone’s home, I can hear a lot of noise coming from inside so I’ll ring the bell. Oh, that doesn’t work, I’ll knock hard on the door to make myself heard.

Narrator: Hello Tracy, lovely to meet you, and thank you, yes, I’d love to come in. Hello, you must be Jason. And these must be your enchanting children. That must be Wayne, I believe he’s 5 and trapped underneath him, I can just see two little legs sticking out; that must be your 3 year old Chantelle Madonna. Do you think you ought to ask Wayne to release her from the head lock, she is screaming quite loud? Yes, I understand what you mean Jason, it’s the law of the jungle out there and she has to learn how to fight. And the little one screaming her head off in the buggy, is that Katie Davina. She’s about 18 months old I believe. Is she’s named after Katie Price by any chance? Yes, Tracy, I do agree Katie Price is such a natural. She’s lovely, isn’t she?

Narrator: As you know I’ve come along to try to find out what the word natural means to you with regard to things around you and your food, and you’ve made an excellent start with Katie Price being a natural. Is there anything here in your charming living room that you think of as being natural? Yes, good suggestion, Jason, one wall is painted in a natural shade of blue, and the others are a natural shade of claret. Are you fans of West Ham by any chance? Yes, I thought you must be and yes, it’s only natural living in this part of London that you’d support that team.

Narrator: Is there anything else in the room you can think of as being natural or happening naturally. No. OK let’s see if I can make some suggestions. Tracy, did you have the children by natural birth?

Tracey: Too right I did, I didn't want any o' that new fangled water birth stuff. My Mum said it ain't natural and only fish gives birth in water. And I'm no fish and I can't even swim so I'd probably have ended up drowning meself and the baby. No, they was all born perfectly naturally, I got the doctors to give me every pain killer they could lay their 'ands on.

Narrator: Jason, do you think we all understand the word natural in exactly the same way.

Jason: No, we don't and I'll tell you why. Last week I was up before the law and I tried to tell the old geezer sat there that it was only natural to go out with your mates on a Friday night, and it's only natural to have a bit of a skinful, and well, it's just natural high spirits ain't it to get a bit carried away, and that's why we threw the brick through the shop window.

Narrator: Did he understand what you meant?

Jason: No, 'e obviously don't understand what natural means 'cos 'e gave me an ASBO.

Narrator: Moving on then, have you had any other thought about the meaning of natural?

Jason: We asked Tracy's Mum, and she asked a friend, and she said that natural ain't always good. She reckoned if we'd kept everyfing natural we wouldn't 'ave invented electricity and we'd still be living in caves.

Narrator: That's a different way of thinking about it. That's good. And yes, I do agree, it would be an awful waste of your 50" plasma tv is we didn't have electricity. Let's try something different, perhaps we could move on to natural food, Tracy, did you find you have natural food in the flat?

Tracy: We 'ad trouble wiv that one. We weren't sure what you meant by natural food. I found a packet of cheese sticks that said they was made from natural flavoured cheese, is that what you mean?

Narrator: I was thinking more of fruit or vegetables. No, I can see from the looks on your faces that you're having a bit of a problem with that. What about things such as apples? No. Or, let's try bananas or grapes. Still no, well what about broccoli or peas? You're still shaking your heads.

Tracy: My Wayne 'e won't touch any of that stuff. But the kids do eat fruit yoghurt, and drink fruit squash, so that's natural ain't it?

Narrator: Well, what about potatoes, they're a natural source of food, do you have potatoes in the flat?

Tracy: Oh yeah, we've got frozen chips, frozen potato wedges and you'll be really impressed wiv the huge bag of 36 packets of potato crisps I've just bought. So yeah, we definitely must be eating natural potatoes.

Narrator: Hmm, that wasn't quite what I had in mind. Does it bother you that your children are growing up eating food that might have a lot of un-natural additives in it? Do you think it's good for the children?

Jason: It's all food, Man. Look at us, we eat it and ain't done us no 'arm.

Narrator: On that note I think we'll bid our farewell to the Smith family and wend our way back. You may be interested to know that when I contacted them a few months later to ask if they'd made any changes since my visit the answer was“No”, but Tracy was pregnant again and it seems that when it comes to doing what comes naturally, Tracy and Jason are absolute naturals.

Joking apart, there's more than one moral to this story. From a naturopathic perspective 'natural' is a fundamental tenet but getting the message across to the public isn't easy; Jamie Oliver tried it and found it a frustrating experience.