



Mind over matter

If a natural, pain-free labour sounds too good to be true, HypnoBirthing could be the answer...

Think of hypnosis and embarrassing stage antics with swinging pendants might come to mind. But did you know that hypnotherapy can help relieve many health problems encountered during pregnancy, such as stress, blood pressure, digestive complaints, skin problems and – perhaps most crucially – fear of labour?

How can hypnotherapy help?

HypnoBirthing, which is a form of hypnotherapy, aims to avoid much of the pain and fear associated with childbirth. The concept of harnessing the power of the mind to ease pain is an ancient one, but the idea of HypnoBirthing is relatively new. Back in the 1900s Dr Dick-Read observed that women who were calmer during birth experienced easier labours, but it wasn't until 15 years ago that HypnoBirthing was created. It works on the theory that using self-hypnosis, a woman can bring her body into a state of deep relaxation in which the body's muscles can work the way that they are intended to during childbirth.

What does HypnoBirthing really involve?

Couples attend a course made up of about four sessions, or 12 hours in total. During the course, they learn the background to HypnoBirthing and are shown hypnotic methods such as breathing and relaxation exercises. 'It is important that the birthing partner attends the sessions, as the hypnosis is far more effective when you have someone supporting you in the techniques,' says HypnoBirth specialist, Suzanne Austen. In the US the concept is increasingly taking hold with many medical professionals attending the courses. Suzanne continues, 'It's now so popular in the States that in some cities more than 50 per cent of pregnant women use HypnoBirthing. The idea is slowly gaining hold here as more women find that they can achieve a pain-free birth. The mind's power shouldn't be underestimated, especially when it comes to having babies!'

You will not be put into any sort of trance and will be fully aware of what is going on around you, simply remaining calm and in

THE THERAPIST

Suzanne Austen has been practising clinical hypnotherapy for four years and qualified as a HypnoBirthing specialist over a year ago. 'I grew up on a farm in New Zealand and new birth was a part of daily life. It struck me that animals cope better with labour than humans, and from an early age I was determined to help women have the most natural, pain-free labour possible,' explains Suzanne. 'Western women have been conditioned to expect traumatic birth, so that is normally exactly what happens.'



THE TESTER

Sophia is 27 weeks pregnant with her first baby. She's had a relatively easy pregnancy, but despite doing yoga and tai chi, she gets stressed easily and is hoping hypnotherapy will help her learn to relax.

SOPHIA'S VERDICT

'Sign me up! I was a little sceptical but now I am interested in attending the full course with my husband. I want a home birth and I think HypnoBirthing could help me. I know it can't guarantee a pain-free delivery, but it should definitely help manage the pain.'

control. 'Childbirth is all about confidence, if you go into labour with a positive frame of mind, the whole experience will be far better for you, and your baby,' says Suzanne.

How does it work?

HypnoBirthing teaches that if a woman can overcome fear, she will have an easier labour, because fear creates tension, which may lead to pain. The idea is to eliminate pain, allowing the body to do its job naturally. By encouraging you to visualise different areas, the therapist will guide you through all parts of your body, aiming to teach you to relax fully. You and your birth partner will learn the visualisation techniques necessary to help you relax during labour. 'From the women I teach, 65–70 per cent go through labour without pain relief and the remainder have gas and air,' says Suzanne. 'HypnoBirthing mothers generally have shorter labours with fewer complications, and many say their babies are happier than their other children born without HypnoBirthing.'

CONTACT

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