

How to breeze

If a pain-free labour without drugs sounds too good to be true, think again. Relax, take a deep breath and hypnotise yourself to give birth without the hurt

“Giving birth to Anna was such a relaxing experience – I was in my own little bubble,” smiles Angela Chadwick, 35, from Hove, mum to Adam, 4, Daniel, 2, and Anna, 18 months.

If you're wondering how to get Angela's attitude, look no further than hypnotherapy for pregnancy and birth. It may sound like part of Derren Brown's mystical act, but you don't have to be a magician. In fact, an increasing number of mums-to-be are turning to hypnosis to manage pain and help make birth a calm and positive experience.

STEP 1 “Now just relax...”

For most of us, the word hypnosis brings to mind someone in a trance-like state, under the control of a creepy-looking hypnotist. But in reality, hypnosis is simply a very deep state of relaxation where you are still very much in control of your actions.

“Hypnosis for birth is all about relaxation and learning how to control pain,” explains Monica Black, a clinical hypnotherapist at London-based Hampstead Hypnotherapy (www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com). “You're completely aware and awake, just incredibly relaxed. You're still able to talk and work with the midwives.

“By self-hypnosis through breathing and relaxation, you can control the pain of labour, potentially speed up delivery and, overall, have a more enjoyable birth experience.”

Mum's story

Laura Lawson, 33, from London, mum to Delilah, 11 weeks, was induced at 42 weeks, and feared losing control of her labour and birth. “Hypnosis made me braver. In hospital I was left alone through the night after the first pessary. With your first birth, labour is unknown, so listening to the hypnosis CD I'd been practising for three months was very reassuring. I lay in bed thinking, ‘It's OK, I'm calm.’”

STEP 2 Don't be scared

According to Monica, giving birth doesn't have to hurt. “Society has made women believe giving birth is painful, so mums-to-be have a preconceived fear of it. Fear leads to tension, tension leads to pain. Through the relaxed state of hypnosis you can allay your fears and control pain. You can never take away the sensation of giving birth, but under hypnosis it becomes virtually pain free.”

Mum's story

After giving birth to first baby Adam without hypnosis, Angela Chadwick was delighted by the pain relief it offered for her second and third births. “After my first child, I had jaw ache from clenching the gas-and-air mouthpiece so hard. But with hypnosis for Daniel and Anna's births, I had no problem. Every time I felt my body tense, I was able to go with it – the pain just melted away.”

STEP 3 Numb your body parts

Monica teaches mums-to-be to mentally ‘numb’ areas of their bodies. “You can learn how to numb whatever part of the body you want. Once you've gained control, you feel sensation but you won't feel pain.”

STEP 4 “Turn down” the pain

Monica's second method is to visualise a control knob measuring your pain from zero to 10. “When contractions get stronger, you simply turn the level down,” she explains.

STEP 5 Go with contractions

As well as helping manage the pain, hypnosis may also speed up labour. “By being so chilled out and pain free, birth can also be quicker,” says Monica. “When you relax the mind you also relax the body, so instead of fighting, you'll go with the contractions.”

Mum's story

The speed of Angela Chadwick's home birth surprised even the midwives. “When they arrived they asked if my waters had broken and if they could examine me. I replied, ‘I'm just bearing down.’ They'd no idea contractions were a minute apart. They'd never seen a birth like Anna's.”

It worked for us!

“IT'S HELPING ME BOND WITH MY BUMP”



“I play the relaxation CDs to my bump. I'm hoping my baby, having heard the music in the womb, will recognise it after birth and sleep when I play it.”

Annie Bambach, 34, from Northampton, 30 weeks pregnant

“MY PARTNER'S INVOLVED”

“Going to the hypnotherapy classes together has made my husband feel more involved. He'll be there to keep me informed so that I know what to expect, but I can still stay relaxed in my hypnotic state.”

Grainne O'Callaghan, 28, from Dublin, 35 weeks pregnant

“IT WAS SO EASY TO LEARN”



“I had one-to-one sessions when I was six months pregnant. I learned deep breathing and relaxation techniques easily, as well as visualisation. I listened to the CD every night and it really aided my sleep, too.”

Laura Lawson, 33, from London, mum to Delilah, 11 weeks

pregnancy & birth

through birth (yes really!)

“I beat my fear of birth with hypnotherapy”



Sarah Baxter, 24, is mum to Pagan, 3, and Gryffin, 8 months, and lives with her partner Lance, 24, in Suffolk.

“I didn't prepare mentally for Pagan's birth. I was in denial that it would hurt and never felt in control. Pagan got stuck and I needed stitches. I felt because of the long, traumatic birth, I later suffered from PND.

My second pregnancy was unplanned. I was so scared I considered a termination. With time, though, I came round to the idea. I didn't want a hospital birth again so

I decided on a home birth and bought a Natal Hypnotherapy Birth Preparation CD.

I listened to it every day from 30 weeks. I went into labour very early in the morning, put the CD on and went back to sleep. When I woke an hour later, I used TENS and bounced on my birthing ball, listening to the CD again. I stayed calm and, though my contractions got painful, I could handle them. But the baby got stuck, so we had to go to hospital for a ventouse delivery.

Even though I didn't get my home birth, hypnosis helped me deal with labour – I didn't panic and felt completely in control, a total contrast to my first birth.” **PP**

“I was nervous about hypnosis before I had a go, but it's just like that wonderful moment when you're about to drift off to sleep”

Rachel Algan, 29, from London, 32 weeks pregnant

ESSENTIAL INFO

When should you start?

The optimum time to start practising hypnosis, according to Monica, is at five to six months pregnant, but it's possible to start as late as two weeks before due date.

How much will it cost?

Prices for classes vary, but one-to-one sessions with Monica Black cost between £375 and £475, depending on the number of sessions you choose to attend.

Where to find out more

Type 'hypnosis for birth' or 'hypnobirthing' in a search engine to find details of local courses and practitioners, such as www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com and www.betterbirth.co.uk. To order a natal hypnotherapy CD, visit www.natalhypnotherapy.co.uk.

click it!

For more on your options for birth, and other mums' experiences, visit www.practicalparenting.co.uk