

THE POWER OF
HYPNOBIRTHING
10 REASONS WHY IT'S FOR YOU

CHRISTINE HUNTINGFORD



■ **CHRISTINE HUNTINGFORD** discovered hypnobirthing when she was pregnant with her son in 2010/11 and used it again for the birth of her daughter in 2012.

Not satisfied with just passing on her materials to family and friends, in 2015, she qualified as a hypnobirthing instructor after completing the Katharine Graves Hypnobirthing Teacher Training Course (accredited by the Royal College of Midwives for the high standard, professionalism and quality of the course). She has taught many couples since then, under her company Magical Baby Moments, based

in Romford, Essex, in the UK.

In early 2017, she ended her 17-year career in the magazine media industry and decided to dedicate more time to hypnobirthing. This book is the first of many exciting projects that she has in mind to help make hypnobirthing the antenatal birth preparation course of choice.

In loving memory of Guy Robert Huntingford Scott

Your life was short, but we will remember you always. The impact that you have on this world grows every day. You continue to inspire me.

*Thank you
Love, Mummy*

xxx



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CHRISTINE HUNTINGFORD MAGICAL BABY MOMENTS

With special thanks to my lovely family and friends who have supported me with this book, especially Geraldine Scott, Janet Osorio, Cathryn Armstrong, Tracey Levy-King and Helen Bland, who helped with the editing stages.

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MAGICAL BABY MOMENTS

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The moral right of the author has been asserted.

■ This book is designed to be a helpful insight into the benefits of using hypnobirthing during pregnancy, labour and birth and how it can be used by all women. It does not constitute medical advice: all women should seek advice from medical caregivers throughout their pregnancy, labour and birth by a qualified midwife or obstetrician.

While hypnobirthing is a practice used successfully by thousands of women around the world, it does not guarantee a pain-free, drug-free birth, or guarantee or promise any expected outcome of labour.

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INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, you are most probably planning to be pregnant, are pregnant already or know someone who is pregnant. Welcome! This book will help you understand what hypnobirthing is and how it can benefit you (or any woman, for that matter).

Maybe you're a first-time mum who has never experienced labour and birth and you are wondering if hypnobirthing can help you prepare for that big day. Yes it can!

Maybe you have a child or children already, but you gave birth to them without using hypnobirthing techniques. Now you're wondering if these could give you a better birth experience because you have heard other people say great things about them. Yes they could!

Or maybe you know someone who is pregnant and you want to find out how learning hypnobirthing can support her. This book will tell you how it can.

Perhaps your road to pregnancy has been a bumpy one. If so, this book will be invaluable. Sadly, miscarriages and stillbirths are very common and it is only when you enter the world of pregnancy that you realise how many people they affect.

In the UK, the statistics for miscarriage (up to 24 completed weeks of gestation) varies; some sources quote 1 in 6 pregnancies, some quote 1 in 4. Either way, it's a high statistic.

Babies who pass away beyond 25 weeks of gestation are known as stillbirths. According to the NHS website, one in every 200 births ends in a stillbirth. Eleven babies are stillborn every day in the UK. I am deeply sorry if you are in this position. I have been there myself and my heartfelt sympathies are with you. I sincerely hope that all proceeds well with this pregnancy.

The good news is that hypnobirthing can benefit each and every expectant mum. I am going to explain the power of it and I will give your 10 fantastic reasons why hypnobirthing is for *you*.

While the word 'hypnobirthing' can be misleading and may conjure up deceptive images, a hypnobirthing course is a down-to-earth and simple approach to understanding and accepting pregnancy and labour as a natural process. Statistically,

very few women need medical assistance to give birth to their baby.

So, if you are currently pregnant or you know someone who is, let me give you insight into how thousands of women around the world are choosing to reconnect with their intuitive side and find a new approach to welcoming labour and birth with calm confidence.

Why am I so passionate about hypnobirthing? Because I've been there and done it. I have used it not once, but twice. So I know *how* it works and *that* it works! I'd like to share with you a little bit about my experience and what inspired me to write this book.

As I mentioned, I have experienced a miscarriage — this was with my first pregnancy. At 12 weeks, there was no heartbeat. It took almost a year before I was pregnant again.

As the months passed and our second pregnancy continued without concern, I settled. I began to look to the future and think about ways to prepare for birth. Sometime in my final trimester, I stumbled across a hypnobirthing book in a magazine article. Although I thought that it might be a bit too 'out there' for me, I headed to Waterstones after work, already planning that if they didn't stock the book, maybe I could order it. Lo and behold, there were two copies in that store! Maybe it wasn't such a 'niche' thing after all...

I read and re-read the book, but to tell you the truth, I was a little unsure as to 'how' exactly it would help me. I guess I was looking for something concrete to 'do'. I hadn't quite realised at that point that it was actually about 'being'. Nevertheless, the words in the book were very present in my mind when labour began.

My labour started at midnight and we progressed through the night peacefully. In the morning, I took some paracetamol and used my birthing ball to bounce away. When things got a bit more intense, I used a TENS machine, which I found really effective. All the while I was focused and calm, taking each contraction as a stepping stone to meeting our baby. This wonderfully relaxed home birth and very peaceful labour tragically ended with my son born sleeping. Now is not the time to go into why or how. I know in my heart that our angel was sent to us for a reason. I believe

he was a major crossroads in my personal development. He pushed me to study hypnobirthing further and inspired me to become a teacher and now to write this book. I am the person that I am today because of him!

Whilst still grieving and in shock as to how this could have happened to us, I fell pregnant again. It was our plan to try for another baby quickly, so we were ecstatic. However, we were also still grieving for our baby boy, wondering what life would have been like if he had lived.

My husband, our families and our close friends were all extremely anxious throughout the entire pregnancy. It was going to be nine long months of waiting to find out whether we would be lucky on our third attempt and see him or her grow up alongside us. During this pregnancy, I pulled out that hypnobirthing book again and re-read it, this time with fresh eyes, after having experienced birth. I could clearly see now that the techniques I had read about, which had left me wondering 'how' they



HYPNOBIRTHING IS A DOWN-TO-EARTH AND SIMPLE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING PREGNANCY AND LABOUR AS A NATURAL PROCESS

could help me be relaxed during labour, really had worked. When I looked back on how calm and wonderful my labour at home was, it was all because of hypnobirthing. I had let my body go into spontaneous labour when it was ready and I had trusted it and nature to take me through that journey. The relaxation scripts that seemed so simplistic had subconsciously carried me through each and every contraction and through giving birth to my boy. Holy moly, this stuff really did work, even though I hadn't realised when I was using it!

As I couldn't find a hypnobirthing teacher in my area, I bought myself more hypnobirthing material and carried on teaching myself about how to connect with my body again for this next labour and birth.

The birth of our daughter was in hospital and despite the clinical environment; we took control of our labour. We used the space there to my advantage, by walking

up and down the unexpectedly quiet corridors through the middle of the night and being as mobile as possible when we were in the labour room, by using the birthing ball and pacing around. There isn't much to say about her birth, other than it was active, calm and quick. I felt much more attuned to my body and knew what stage my baby was at. When I thought that my baby was ready to come, I was examined by the midwife who said I was indeed fully dilated and it was time for my baby to be born. Within a few moments, she was in my arms and we were crying with absolute joy!

It was then that I also realised that whilst a big part of hypnobirthing is about how relaxed the mother is, the other factors that also contribute to having a positive experience are:

- *being in control of your birth preferences*
- *being listened to*
- *letting yourself go*
- *trusting in your instincts and understanding mother nature and your body*
- *having a supportive and calm birthing partner who can advocate for you*

I am not the mother-earth type of person that you might assume a hypnobirthing teacher to be. At the time I was your average run-of-of-the-mill thirty-something who wanted to make labour a positive experience, especially after the emotional roller-coaster that we had been on. I can confidently say that hypnobirthing works. Yes it sounds a bit 'out there' but seriously it isn't — the crux of it is straightforward, logical, natural and quite normal actually.

After the birth of my daughter, I started lending my books and CDs to friends and family, but somehow it didn't feel enough. So in 2015 I qualified as a hypnobirthing instructor with Katharine Graves, founder of KG Hypnobirthing, and since then I have gone on to teach many couples the simplicity of hypnobirthing. Not only do my courses offer relaxation and visualisation techniques for labour and birth, but I also ensure that all my couples have a clear and balanced picture of the scenarios that might play out during labour and birth, so that they go into this experience with

their eyes wide open, their research done and their choices respected. Unlike most hypnobirthing courses, Magical Baby Moments' courses also offer top tips for looking after a newborn!

So if you're still wondering whether hypnobirthing is for you or not, think no more. It *is*!

Despite the word being linked specifically to birth, hypnobirthing is a skill for life. You can use the relaxation and visualisation techniques in any number of situations such as: the dentist, breastfeeding, falling asleep, resting and other stressful situations. Maybe you saw the article about a footballer who apparently whispered hypnobirthing/breathing techniques to his mate when he broke his leg on the football pitch, after he learnt these techniques with his wife?!

In the following chapters, I will give you 10 indisputable reasons why you should book yourself onto a hypnobirthing course — if not before you have finished reading this book, then definitely when you reach the end! (*See the voucher code for a course with Magical Baby Moments available in the final chapter.*)

By reading this book, you'll understand how to bring your birth partner into the centre of this experience, so that they can fully support you and your baby during labour, birth and beyond.

You'll also realise that the midwifery care that we receive, whilst mostly brilliant and supportive, can sometimes lead a woman down a path of care where she is not presented with the full picture. Unfortunately, overstretched midwives simply don't always have the time to explain and offer options. A hypnobirthing course will give you the full picture — you'll get all the facts and head into your birth with a toolkit of knowledge, options and techniques to achieve a calm and positive birth experience, no matter what scenarios/circumstances are presented to you, and if you want to do further reading around a subject, your instructor can point you in the right direction.

The following pages will show you that a hypnobirthing course presents all sides of the story and clarifies the risks and benefits of most situations. It explains that there are often alternatives too, which are not necessarily offered to you on your birthing day. This is why it is such a good idea to invest in a course — it enables you to explore

most likely situations and make decisions, knowing all the facts beforehand.

Now don't just take my word for it, here are some testimonials from past clients.



'Hypnobirthing is something every expectant couple should learn. There is so much to think about when preparing for the birth of your baby and this helps to focus the mind through an intensive course and with the relaxation scripts.'

Claire, expectant mum

'The course has helped me understand the process of birth in greater depth. I feel more confident about dealing with the process in a relaxed and calmer manner.'

Zoe, mum-to-be

'Christine created a calm and welcoming environment in which to learn. She is very knowledgeable and has made my husband and I feel more confident about our birthing experience. The hypnobirthing course is very inspiring and definitely prepares you mentally for a natural birth.'

Catherine, second-time mum

'Following a significant amount of hypnobirthing research, Magical Baby Moments was recommended to me. I found Christine engaging and insightful... and she makes a lovely cup of tea! There was always space for discussion and questions or responses were never dismissed. The four weeks have increased my confidence massively. I feel I have the capability to be in control of my labour and environment and I can't wait to meet my baby. Baby T isn't due until June - so that will be the real test - but the classes have certainly educated us both about the pregnancy and labour process.'

Louise, first-time mum

'The course is very different from what I expected it to be (in a good way!). It combines information with relaxation techniques which help exercise more control over your body and mind.'

John, first-time dad



If you read this book right to the end, you will have a brand new perspective on what hypnobirthing is and how it can be life-changing for mums-to-be, birth partners and babies. It will leave you intrigued about the power of hypnobirthing, so that you will most likely want to investigate it further, eager to learn more about how to give yourself a positive birth experience, just like the couples who have been mentioned in this book.

I promise that if you put this book down and don't take action, you'll look back one day after your baby was born wondering if your birth experience would have been different if you had followed through with your hypnobirthing journey. Don't do that to yourself. You deserve more, and so does your baby.

Let's not delay any further, let's find out why hypnobirthing is for *you* and for every expectant mum, regardless of age, pregnancy symptoms, BMI (Body Mass Index), lifestyle, beliefs, preferred place of birth etc.

This book will change the way you think about birth and hypnobirthing, and quite possibly change your life! ©

01

What is hypnobirthing and who is it for?

Every woman should have the birth that is right for her. Let me repeat that — every woman should have the birth that is right for her.

However, this is not often the case. Women are taken down a route of care where for 8.5 months they are told to ‘do this’ and ‘do that’ in order to give the baby the best possible chance to thrive and develop in the womb – most of which I agree with. However, in those final weeks before their baby’s estimated due date arrives, their caregivers — usually midwives or obstetricians — are then often suggesting ‘plans of action’ should this baby not arrive ‘on time’, when really, in most cases, there is no medical reason or need to rush baby out.

There are many mums who will carry their baby past their ‘due date’. This is not a reason for concern. It is simply part of nature. If you and your baby are fine, you need to ask yourself why anyone should feel justified to interfere. One reason for a baby being born later than the estimated due date could simply be a matter of the due date being slightly out. Scans are not 100% accurate. But most importantly, there is *no* ‘due date’. ‘Due dates’ even vary from country to country (40 weeks in the UK, 41 weeks in France for example!) Due dates are *estimates*. All women are different, all babies are different and all pregnancies are different. The World Health Organization states that a baby is usually born anytime between 37 and 42 weeks. Only 4% of babies are born on their ‘due date’!

Currently in the UK, caregivers are booking in thousands of low-risk mothers for an induction before they have even reached the 42-week mark. Why have they not been given the chance to get to the 42-week mark first and then weigh up the options? Is an induction really the right type of labour for them?

Don’t misunderstand me; I am not saying this lightly or flippantly. I only advocate pursuing a natural and spontaneous labour when both mum and baby are in good health. If there are any medical concerns, alternatives should be considered. But if you are a healthy mum who has experienced a straightforward, uncomplicated pregnancy, then reaching the 42-week mark is totally fine.

When a woman is beyond 40 weeks gestation, couples should consider evidence-based research to get a clearer picture of what the risks are of going beyond 40 weeks

and how likely something is to happen or not. If they have a condition that is a cause for concern, they need to choose the path that protects the well-being of both the mother and the baby.

Hypnobirthing supports all options for birth, so being induced, choosing intervention or opting for an elective Caesarean section are all possible options, *even* with hypnobirthing (see Chapter 2).

Demystifying the word ‘hypnobirthing’

Before we get into what hypnobirthing is about and what it involves, I want to vent how annoying I find the word ‘hypnobirthing’ to be, although in essence it simply tells it as it is: ‘hypno’ comes from the word ‘hypnosis’, so ‘hypnobirthing’ just means ‘hypnosis for birth’. However, too often the word ‘hypnosis’ conjures up false images.

Forget the hypnotists and hypnosis shows you see on TV — these programmes are created and edited for entertainment. A hypnobirthing practitioner will never say to you ‘look into my eyes...’ or move a pendulum in front of your face, for example. So you can tell your birth partner that they don’t need to run for the hills! You both just need to clear your mind of any preconceived ideas about what you ‘think’ hypnosis is and be open to learning what it *really* means.

Hypnobirthing is equivalent to clinical hypnotherapy for other matters, where individuals are able to make life-enhancing changes, such as stopping smoking or overcoming a phobia. Hypnosis doesn’t put you in some altered state of reality, making you do things you wouldn’t normally do — it only puts you in an altered state of *consciousness*. In fact, all hypnosis is *self-hypnosis* — only *you* can put yourself into hypnosis, only *you* can decide whether to relax into a ‘hypnotic trance’ or not. So hypnobirthing, like meditation and mindfulness, is about learning to take control of your mind and your body; through breathing, visualisation and relaxation techniques, and being guided to think differently and to be open to change.

The mind is extremely powerful and it is divided into the conscious and the subconscious (or unconscious). Every single moment of the day, these two components are in constant dialogue, but the subconscious is the master of all that

you think and do: it constitutes around 88% of your mind. In hypnobirthing we use scripts that relax the conscious part and tap into your subconscious, which will help you go into your labour 'bubble' and allow you to remain calm, confident and focused throughout. This will enable you to trust your instincts and connect at a deeper level with what your body and baby are experiencing.

However, hypnobirthing is not just about the 'hypno' bit. It is also about having a deeper understanding of what your body is doing during labour, of the natural and physiological reactions and changes that occur. There are recommended techniques and positions that can help optimise your labour, to make it more comfortable and, in many cases, faster than labours that don't use these simple and effective tools.

So if you've been put off by media, friends and family because they showed or told you that labour is some horrific, screaming, swearing, painful ritual that you have to pass through in order to hold your baby, know that it doesn't have to be that way. Birthing has the potential to be a calm and positive experience... if you want it to be and if you learn how to make it so.

Carry on reading this book and I promise that you will discover 10 great reasons why hypnobirthing is a skillset for every expectant mum, for each and every pregnancy. It is also for your birth partner, because it will bring them front and centre to the whole pregnancy, labour and birth experience, enabling them to offer you essential support throughout (see Chapters 6 and 7). Furthermore, what they will learn from a hypnobirthing course will serve them well for the rest of their lives, as most of the tools and techniques are applicable to many circumstances, such as public speaking, going to the dentist, flying — in fact any situation where anxiety creeps in and you would rather take control and relax.

Who is a hypnobirthing course for?

Despite there being a shift in perceptions, many people still think that hypnobirthing is only for a select group, such as hippy-types, yummy-mummies and lentil-lovers. Trust me when I say that *every* expectant mum can benefit from a hypnobirthing course, regardless of whether:

- *she is considered 'low risk' or 'high risk' during her antenatal care*
- *it is her first child or her tenth*
- *she would like to give birth at home, in a birthing centre or at hospital*
- *she prefers a totally unmedicalised labour*
- *she wants to have an elective Caesarean section (C-section)*
- *she requires an emergency C-section*

You see, a hypnobirthing course — or at least the one taught by Magical Baby Moments — is a *full* antenatal course, where all options and choices are explored.

Let's pause for a second and consider the following. How are you expected to make choices if you don't have a clear understanding of all the options available to you? How can you decide what's right for you if you don't know the pros and cons for each of those choices? Giving birth should be about *informed decision*. That means fully understanding your options and being told the full picture so that you can decide what feels right for you and your baby.

So a hypnobirthing course is not only about relaxation and breathing techniques, visualisations and positive birth affirmations; it is an all-round programme that teaches everything that an expectant mother and her birth partner need to know about late pregnancy, labour, birth and beyond. From the physical changes that occur in a mother's body towards the end of pregnancy, as it prepares for labour, through to what a woman can expect to happen during labour and birth. Magical Baby Moments also has a section on how to care for a newborn, as I feel it is important to help new parents as much as possible beyond birth too.

Hypnobirthing courses are not just for people who expect labour to follow a certain path. No two births are the same and labour does not always follow the exact path that you would like it to take either. So you have to be open-minded and be ready to embrace the other scenarios, should they arise.

Hypnobirthing classes teach couples how to be fully informed of all the circumstances that can occur. These topics are discussed in detail so that the participants are confident with the terminology and all the benefits, risks and

alternatives that each choice presents. Therefore, if any of these matters arise during their pregnancy or labour, they already know how they feel about certain interventions and whether instinctively these feel like the right decisions for them and their baby or not. Couples are also often reminded throughout the classes that there is always the option to question procedures and to say 'no' or to ask for extra time if possible.

A hypnobirthing course is about information, empowerment and choice. It is about having knowledge in order to have power and control over your situation. It should allay any fears or preconceptions that you or your birth partner may have. When you complete a course, you should walk away feeling more knowledgeable, confident and excited at the anticipation of the arrival of your precious baby. Being pregnant is a miracle. How the body, mind and spirit are intertwined in pregnancy and labour is mysterious, and giving birth will be magical, in whichever way is right for your situation.

Hypnobirthing is not a craze or a fad. It has been around for centuries. It has been done instinctively and intuitively, when communities were tighter, when people took the time to listen and care and when it didn't have a label attached to it. In this modern, frantic world, it has become a necessity for expectant parents who want to be fully prepared for a positive and confident birth experience. ☺



'I feel much more confident, informed and empowered. I am aware of my choices and also much more aware of my ability to birth our first baby. Prior to attending, I was not focused and felt that I had lots of bits of information, but I didn't know how to make it meaningful for me.'

I highly recommend the course to all mums. It will ensure that birthing will be a more pleasant experience, avoiding unnecessary stress. Knowledge is power and the course has certainly empowered me.'

FACE-TO-FACE HYPNOBIRTHING COURSE

The Magical Baby Moments group course consists of four weekday evenings or two weekend days, on selected dates.

Ideally this is taught to you anywhere from 20 weeks onwards.

If you are late into your pregnancy and think you've missed the opportunity, don't worry, you haven't.

Hypnobirthing principles for a relaxed and calm birth are easy to learn, so doing the course in the final weeks of pregnancy can be as effective as doing it mid-way through your pregnancy.

Magical Baby Moments also offers private courses.

If you can't make it to a face-to-face Magical Baby

Moments course, you have other options: by Skype, or you can do an online version by visiting www.magicalbabymoments.com.

Or you could find a hypnobirthing teacher local to you.

(Look out for the voucher code for a Magical Baby Moments course – available in the final chapter).

02

Reason one: Informed choice

For many aspects of life, most people will research things before they take action. Even when buying a new mobile phone (or other device) people will usually look up various models, do comparisons, maybe even ask friends for recommendations. Only once they have gathered enough information to satisfy them, will they make a decision on which one to buy.

So why is it that so many couples go into labour and birth not fully understanding the processes, their choices and their rights?

Yes, it is an everyday event and we are lucky to have midwives and obstetricians to help us through it. But hospitals are a business, like any other (whether we like it or not), and often their needs and processes are put before the needs of the mother and her baby. Hospitals are most often places for medical emergencies and interventions. In most cases, giving birth is *not* a medical emergency. Going in blind to what your options are could leave you open to helplessly being carried along by the system and potentially missing out on the birth that you had hoped for.

All too often I hear, 'Oh, I had to be induced' or 'I didn't know I had a choice, I just did what they told me'. When I dig a little deeper, I find out they didn't realise at the time that there were alternatives they could ask about. They weren't presented with the real picture of what their options were. For example, they weren't always told about the pros and cons of accepting an induction, or about the pros and cons of *declining* an induction, with evidence-based information. All too often urban myths, such as 'baby will get too big', 'your placenta might fail' or, worse still, 'your body doesn't know how to get labour started', scare a mother and her birth partner into accepting an induction earlier than necessary.

Let's think about it. No meal would taste nice if it was only half-cooked! So why would your body go through labour swiftly and easily if your body isn't ready for it yet?

In the UK the due date is set at 40 weeks, guided by the date of the last menstrual cycle and by the dating scan at 12 weeks. Did you realise that if you were having your baby in France the due date is set at 41 weeks? Remember also that the World Health Organization states that babies are *usually* born anytime between 37 and 42 weeks.

This is a *5-week window*, not a single date in a given month!

So when at 40 weeks your midwife implies or even announces that she will set a date for induction before the 42-week mark has arrived, she is intervening and interrupting the body during a common period for a baby to be born. Why would you want to do that if you and baby are both well and there are no medical concerns? If you feel strongly about not wanting an induction, you can decline and ask to be monitored more closely during this waiting time. You can remain proactive, by self-monitoring your baby by 'counting their kicks' and by encouraging labour naturally (acupuncture, reflexology, gentle exercise etc., something we go through in detail in the course), thus avoiding any unnecessary medical intervention.

Informed choice is just one of the many topics discussed in a hypnobirthing course, ensuring that you understand during pregnancy the most common options for labour and birth. Giving birth is your right. How you want it to be is entirely up to you. The caregivers are there to support you for a happy, healthy and safe delivery, not to enforce you to do anything you are not comfortable with.

Reading and learning what *might* happen will give you the confidence and calmness to deal with any situation that arises. It is important to take control of your pregnancy and birth, by being informed, knowing what the choices are and understanding the associated risks and benefits, so that you can look back on it as a positive birth experience that you were in control of.

During a hypnobirthing course, your teacher will explain to you all the common scenarios that might occur during labour and birth and will help you and your birth partner decide on your birth preferences. Then if/when a situation arises during the course of labour, you:

1. *understand what options are available*
2. *know what your preferences are about those options*
3. *confidently know which choices feel right for you and your baby*

Hypnobirthing will teach you what the body is going through as it births your

baby, including what you are expected to feel during this time for both a vaginal birth and a C-section birth, if this isn't your first baby.



GIVING BIRTH IS YOUR RIGHT. HOW YOU WANT IT TO BE IS ENTIRELY UP TO YOU

Why is informed choice so important?

Every birth experience is different. Knowing this, some women choose to write or think of a 'birth plan' to follow. However, often they are unable to stick to that particular 'birth plan' (for whatever reason) and can end up feeling disheartened and like they've been (or actually were) let down during the labour and birth process.

We, in the hypnobirthing community, are inclined not to call it a birth plan, but instead encourage you to write your labour and birth *preferences*: a list of ideal scenarios, should they be possible, as well as preferred interventions, should they be necessary. Therefore, no matter what your birth experience ends up being:

- *you know that you were in control*
- *you made the decisions*
- *it was the best possible labour and birth for you and your baby*

It therefore becomes a positive birth experience to look back on, regardless of any twists and turns in the process. ☺



'Thank you Christine for being an amazing instructor! It has made me feel so much more positive and confident about giving birth. I am so glad I took your course, to give us a much calmer and natural birth.'

Samantha, mum-to-be

03

Reason two: Connect the mind and body

A central part of the hypnobirthing course is about connecting your body, your mind and your spirit with your baby. (Stay with me here and I'll explain, I promise this isn't mumbo-jumbo!) It's simply about becoming more aware of your body and the amazing journey you and your baby have already been on together and are going to share during the labour and birth.

Hypnobirthing teaches you the skills and techniques to trust in the ability of your incredible body doing what it's designed to do and embrace that journey with calm confidence.

If we just take a moment to think about the miraculous journey of your pregnancy so far... The egg and the sperm fertilised and right now your body instinctively knows how to grow that little person inside of you. This tiny being is growing and developing day by day. Nature is taking care of this process and (in the case of a natural vaginal birth), when the time is right, and your body and baby are ripe, your body will spontaneously and naturally begin to labour. Your cervix will ripen, soften and open. These muscles, which for nine months have remained tight and firm to keep your baby secure in the uterus, will expand to make way for your baby to gently make his way down into your pelvis and birth canal.

The muscles around the top of the uterus, which have gently expanded as your baby has grown, will contract and tighten to help your baby nudge his way downwards. This will happen gently to start with, but may grow in intensity as the body works to move your baby down into the birth canal. These are commonly known as 'contractions' — what we refer to in hypnobirthing as 'surges'.

When a mother understands this process and wishes to work with her body, she will embrace hypnobirthing techniques to keep her calm and focused. If she were to be fearful and hold onto tension, her body would need to work harder to beat the tension (the physiological fight-or-flight response — more about this later). This creates a far more difficult task for the body because her muscles are unable to relax and will not move as efficiently as the contracting uterus would want them to. In turn, she will undoubtedly feel the contractions more intensely, likely resulting in:

- *feeling more uncomfortable during labour*
- *tiring more quickly*
- *asking for pain-relief sooner and/or more often than she would otherwise*

Invariably labour will last longer as the tension and tightness slow down or impede the baby's descent.

The hormone a mother naturally produces to help labour start and to maintain regular contractions is called oxytocin, sometimes known as the 'happy hormone'. The other times when our body produces oxytocin is when we laugh, when we are happy and content, and when we make love. So there is no surprise that this friendly and happy hormone is present during this magical life experience.

The opposing hormone to oxytocin is adrenalin. This little mite makes an appearance when we are scared or stressed. It is also known as the fight-or-flight hormone (or, in the case of labour, the fight-flight-or-freeze hormone). It is released when you feel like you are in a compromised position that you want to get out of as quickly as possible. That rush-to-the-head feeling is the adrenalin in your body preparing you to react. This is what you *don't* want to be feeling during labour: you don't want your body secreting and circulating a host of unhelpful hormones that result in your muscles being all tense to provide speed and strength (to fight or flee), leaving you feeling anxious, scared and panicked. This is not a good place to be mentally or physically when you are about to birth your baby. It is not good for him either, as he can pick up on your emotions and feel the stress, potentially making labour more difficult for him as well. If the midwife detects a baby in distress this will be a cause for concern and alternative care may need to be considered, potentially resulting in a C-section.



CONNECT YOUR BODY, MIND AND
SPIRIT WITH YOUR BABY IN A POSITIVE
WAY TO HAVE A CALM PREGNANCY
AND A POSITIVE BIRTH EXPERIENCE

As you can see, the links between the mind and the body are strong, and you can influence them one way or another. Hypnobirthing scripts, visualisations and positive birth affirmations are all techniques used by mothers to help them remain calm, reassured and focused. All these techniques can make the labour more comfortable (often with reduced or even no pain-relief and fewer medical interventions), which tends to result in a shorter labour. How appealing does that sound?

A hypnobirthing course will teach you and your birth partner a variety of techniques and scripts that will enable you to quickly connect your body, your mind and your spirit with your baby in a positive way, so that you can have a calm pregnancy and a positive birth experience.

Prepare yourself and your birth partner for a birth experience that feels right for you. Use hypnobirthing techniques to calmly connect with your body, your mind and your baby to help achieve the birth you really desire. ©

04

Reason three: Trust in nature

Let's embrace and celebrate the wonderful world of nature and your amazing pregnancy journey so far!

Your body has undertaken a truly magnificent journey to this point, all without you really feeling and knowing what has been going on inside. After conception, there is little that you have to actually 'do' to help grow your baby, other than to maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle, as much as possible. Nature knows the stages of development and in which order things need to happen, so that your baby continues to thrive in the womb.

Day by day, your body has grown this little person inside of you. From a tiny sperm meeting an egg, your baby has grown limbs, organs, a nervous system, a brain, ears etc. and is developing her five senses in the womb to help her navigate the world that we live in. All of this has happened without you being aware of these massive milestones in her development.

So if your body, never having been told 'what to do', can recognise the signs of conception and trigger into action the necessary steps to grow your perfect little baby, what makes you think that your body would make it this far but then not be able to give birth naturally? It absolutely can. You just need to be patient, trust in nature and let it do what it needs to do when it is ready.



TRUST IN NATURE TO KNOW WHEN YOUR BABY IS READY TO BE BORN

The Perinatal Institute states that an estimated date of delivery is rarely accurate – in fact, only 4% of the time is a baby is born on its predicted due date.

Taking this into consideration and the fact that most hospitals in the UK prefer to induce between 41 and 42 weeks, it appears that many babies could be at risk of being born before they are fully developed, meaning that they may require medical assistance once earth-side.

In our modern world, many of us are reliant on quick fixes, pills and potions to do the job for us, rather than looking into options and helping ourselves first. However,

strangely enough, often these medical options are not the easiest solutions; there might be side-effects, risks and downsides to interfering with nature.

If you've had a good pregnancy, your baby is thriving, the two of you are in good health and there are no medical concerns, then trust in nature to know when your baby is ready to be born and that your baby knows (along with your body) exactly what to do and when to do it. Use the medical profession only when there is a medical situation to deal with. When there isn't, allow your midwives to take care of you from an observational point of view and to be there in a supporting role, to guide you and be a helping hand when you need it during labour and when your baby has been born. Finally, enlist the help and love of a supportive birth partner who also believes that your body is doing what it is designed to do.

In a hypnobirthing course, we will draw examples from the animal kingdom and observe how they approach the process of birth. A wild animal doesn't attend antenatal classes, nor does it read books on pregnancy and birth. Yet, it instinctively knows to trust in its nature and follow its body's lead when the time comes to birth its baby.

When learning about the benefits of hypnobirthing, mothers are reminded of the power and wonder of nature and they learn to trust that their bodies will know how to birth their babies. Many hypnobirthing mums describe the births they have had as calm, confident and empowering. ©

05

Reason four: Bond with your baby in pregnancy

In this hectic world that we live in, far too often people feel like there are not enough hours in the day and that they are running from one place to another to get ahead of their never-ending to-do list. A hypnobirthing course will encourage you to wind down every day and spend time focusing on your baby, thereby fostering bonding with him or her. If you have a birth partner, your bond will also grow stronger as a result of practising the techniques together (see Chapters six and seven).

If you're a first-time mum, you are possibly still working. If you are already a mum, juggling family life (and also possibly still working) is a 24-hour job! Either way, taking time out regularly from the craziness of everyday life (although this may often seem impossible) is essential for your health and mental well-being. Just a few moments in the day to be peaceful and still, concentrate on your breathing and let your thoughts flow out of your mind, will have great benefits for you and your baby.

Babies can sense the emotions of the mother, so if she is stressed and tense her baby will pick up on it, and likewise when mum is happy and relaxed. No matter how big or small our everyday stresses are, we all owe it to ourselves to take some time out to relax and recharge. Even if this is achieved only by having an extra five minutes in the bathroom when you shower/have a bath, or a few moments with your eyes closed during your rush-hour commute on public transport, or perhaps those precious moments before you fall asleep or just as you wake up — make the time to unwind.

In a hypnobirthing course, your instructor will read a number of hypnobirthing scripts to you (*these scripts are also given to you to practice at home*). When you take time out to practise these scripts during pregnancy (with your birth partner, or by listening to the audio / MP3s), you will connect with your mind, you will focus on your breathing and in turn you will bond with your baby. The more you do it, the easier it will become. We recommend you listen to them just before going to bed, so that they can be your final thoughts before going to sleep.



TALKING / SINGING / HUMMING WILL HELP
YOU BOND WITH YOUR BABY

When labour starts, you will have this fantastic relaxation toolkit that you can easily tap into.

Talking/singing/humming will also help you bond with your baby. He can hear everything you say, so why not directly engage with him? Other family members can talk to 'the bump' too, so that he familiarises himself with their voices.

Another good idea is to chat to your baby about how you would like your birth to be. Talk to him about your birth preferences and describe to him how you imagine it to be. Many women across the world take time out to connect and bond with their unborn baby. Why wait until he is earth-side when you can start now?

In a hypnobirthing class, mums will often feel the baby move around a lot during the scripts that we practise together. Is this coincidence? Or is this the mother becoming aware of her mind-body-baby connection as her uterus relaxes, giving more space for baby to move around?

If you want to get better acquainted with your little one, continue with your hypnobirthing journey of discovery. ©



'Hypnobirthing teaches simple yet gentle techniques that have a profound effect on you and your baby.'

Katharine Graves, founder of KG Hypnobirthing

06

Reason five: Involve your birth partner during pregnancy

During pregnancy your partner often feels like a bystander. Partners (many of whom have played a crucial role at the beginning) are now left to watch you blossom and grow, without ever really being able to understand or feel what you are experiencing. Many partners will often leave the finding out about birth and baby matters to the mum and will only attend an antenatal class if they are asked to.

Unlike many mainstream antenatal classes, a hypnobirthing course is about connecting both parents with the pregnancy, labour and birth (and if your birth partner isn't the baby's father, it is highly recommended that whoever you choose attends the course with you). Your birth partner needs to understand all the aspects of a hypnobirthing course along with you, so that they can fully support you when the big day arrives.

By attending a hypnobirthing course with you, your birth partner is thoroughly involved in the experience. They have the opportunity to be hands-on during the course and will learn to:

- *understand the process of labour*
- *understand, explore and follow your birth preferences*
- *ask the right questions for your circumstances*
- *read the hypnobirthing scripts to you for maximum effect*
- *appropriately, calmly and confidently support you during labour*
- *look after your newborn baby*

So now you can see it is essential for birth partners to take part in your hypnobirthing journey / programme for mums to feel 100% supported.

There are so many advantages to your birth partner attending a course with you – most importantly that the experience of labour and birth is not unfamiliar when the time comes. ☺



THERE ARE SO MANY ADVANTAGES TO YOUR BIRTH PARTNER ATTENDING A COURSE WITH YOU



'I feel much better now as this is our first baby. I didn't know what to expect but now I feel confident that it will be a nice experience.'

Sergio, dad-to-be

'I didn't realise the pressure and responsibility a birth partner had until I was there myself. You have to really know their birth preferences by heart, so that you are assertive every step of the way. There is a

fine balance in knowing when is the right time to override the birth plan, when the labour isn't playing out how you initially thought. If I hadn't done the course with the mum, I would have gone in blind and no doubt I would have done things very differently. I am so pleased we got the chance to plan ahead and think things through so that we could make decisions confidently.'

Chrissy, birth partner

07

Reason six: Let your birth partner support you during labour and birth

Your birth partner is one of the most important people involved in your birth. It's essential to have someone there in whom you have total confidence and who can support you 100%. It's vital that your birth partner is very clear about your hopes, feelings and preferences for the birth, so that he or she is able to speak up and advocate for you, if needed.

In most cases, the baby's father will be the lucky one who gets to share this extraordinary moment, but you may also opt for your closest friend, your mother, another member of the family or a doula, as well as or instead of him or her. Indeed you may feel that you would like more than one person with you during labour and birth. If so, explain your reasons to your birth partner about having someone else there, saying that they could give him or her support too. The important thing is that you choose someone (or people) that you completely trust and with whom you are at ease. They must be a rock for you, should the going get tough. It is also a good idea to organise a back-up, if for some reason your first choice is unavailable. Most close friends and relatives will jump at the chance of helping you and witnessing a birth.



THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITY HE OR SHE WILL HAVE IS TO OFFER YOU COMPLETE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

The birth partner's job is a very important one. It's not just about providing a hand to squeeze or being able to pant loudly with you, as TV or films sometimes portray! The main responsibility he or she will have is to offer you complete support and encouragement, and keep you as comfortable as possible during labour and birth. You need someone who is prepared to respond to your every whim on the big day, and not be annoyed when you change your mind and just want the room to be silent for hours on end.

This person must be happy to pace the room with you, or to help you with optimal positioning, or to massage you just like you learnt in your hypnobirthing preparation. It should be someone who won't be offended if you get irritable or suddenly ask to be left alone, and someone who will remain strong during difficult moments,

should they arise. Finally, it has to be someone who can be your voice: represent your thoughts and feelings, and stand up for what you want or need, if, during labour, you are unable to (or would rather not) do so yourself.

Your birth partner will experience the whole amazing process. They will be the first to see your baby's head emerging into the world (if they choose to look) and will get the chance to cut the umbilical cord, if they fancy it. It may also be their role to remain with your baby if you need medical attention or feel tired after the birth, or if, for any reason, the baby needs assistance. Your birth partner may have to endure quite a lot during labour and birth, but in doing so will receive the greatest reward: they will have the honour of being one of the first people to get a precious cuddle.

In order for them to be fully aligned with your thinking and know exactly what you are likely to need during labour and birth, it is highly recommended that they do the entire hypnobirthing course with you (see Chapter 6). Not only will they be more informed about late pregnancy, labour and birth, but together you will discuss your preferences and make decisions that feel right for both of you and for your baby, beforehand and on the day. Of course, they will also learn how best to support you during labour, physically as well as emotionally, so that you can focus on connecting with your mind, body and baby. ©



'A hypnobirthing course is a wonderful experience. There is so much to think about when preparing for your baby and this helps to focus the mind in a structured way. Learning the relaxation scripts and doing them with my wife helped me to understand the level of relaxation that she needs to be feeling. It was informative and fun.'

Mayank, father-to-be

08

Reason seven: Release any underlying fears you may have

Have friends and family started telling you about their birthing experiences? Perhaps not all of them have been positive. If you have been told that giving birth involves excruciating pain and screaming, I've got some great news for you: it doesn't have to be like that!

Maybe hearing these stories (or watching too many birth programmes) has created some fears. Don't worry, we all have fears for many different reasons, and some are minor while others are huge. The aim of doing a hypnobirthing course is to unravel those fears, to try to understand why certain aspects of birth make you feel that way and to help you approach those feelings/experiences differently and hopefully more positively.

“ ALLEVIATE ANY STRESS OR ANXIETY YOU MIGHT BE HOLDING ON TO, PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE BIRTH

If you're a first-time mum and thinking about labour, you're probably trying to imagine something that is unlike anything you've ever experienced before (except for what you've seen on TV and in the movies, which, let's face it, is created to be dramatic!).

Every step of your journey so far has been new and unfamiliar — the moment you found out you were pregnant, as the pregnancy continued and you felt your baby developing and moving, seeing your precious creation on the monitor and hearing that galloping heartbeat during your antenatal appointments — and you were quite possibly overcome with happiness and joy and/or anxious anticipation time and time again. It's ok — it's all normal! No one says how you should think or feel at any point during this whole process, and this includes your actual birth!

Have you thought about your labour and what that day might be like or how it might unfold? Have you started thinking about how you would like your birth to be? Often mums-to-be ask me, 'Will I even realise when labour has started?' Yes, you will! Maybe not straight away, but it will soon become clear. Does thinking about this make you feel scared, frightened, nervous, anxious or happy, excited, eager and joyful

— or perhaps a mix of emotions? Whatever you are feeling is OK, it's all very normal.

If you've given birth before and you're reading this thinking, 'My experience was overwhelming, I was fearful and in pain', I'm asking you to consider how it could be different this time — quite possibly a positive, calm and peaceful event.

Hypnobirthing helps you to open up and discuss these feelings and use 'fear release' scripts to alleviate any stress or anxiety you might be holding on to, particularly about the birth.

Many, many women around the world are now turning to hypnobirthing for better birth experiences. Being informed correctly about your options during labour and birth, and understanding how the uterus works and what your body is going through, to bring your baby into this world, allows you to be prepared for that big day. It enables you to positively and calmly embrace the changes in your body during this final journey — the moments before you meet your baby.

Athletes who run a 100m sprint prepare their mind and their body in so many different ways and practise endlessly. Surely, it makes sense then to appropriately prepare and 'train' your mind and your body for what could potentially be the biggest physical event your body endures, in labour and birth. And in doing so, you are then not fearful of approaching that starting line of labour because you know you're as ready as you can be in mind, body and spirit.



'I would recommend hypnobirthing for the nervous expectant mother. I have come away from the course remembering that it is mind over matter. Thank you for changing my mindset and helping me prepare mentally and emotionally.'

Fahmi, expectant mum

Along with preparing your body and mind, it is also really important to know how to create the right environment for your birth, whether it is a planned home birth, a hospital birth or a midwife-led-unit birth (your hypnobirthing teacher will have suggestions on how to do this). But who knows? Perhaps your cheeky monkey wants to make an entrance much more quickly and decides to arrive before you get to your chosen venue or create your desired environment.

Fear not, hypnobirthing is here! The techniques and information shared in a hypnobirthing course will help you to understand the stages of labour and prepare you to instinctively follow what your body is telling you to do, no matter where you end up giving birth.

Your hypnobirthing teacher and the techniques that the course teaches you will allow you to release any fears that you have surrounding labour and birth, enabling you to remain relaxed and focused, as you prepare to welcome your baby into this world, no matter where or how the birth unfolds.

Hypnobirthing is about preparation and mindset; with a little preparation and the correct mindset, you and your baby can benefit enormously. The more you practise, the more naturally and easily it will come to you. ☺

09

Reason eight: Learn natural ways to keep your body relaxed and comfortable in labour

Often at the end of pregnancy, women are eager to meet their baby. They are reaching the end of this chapter with their body in full bloom. It is at this point that they may feel like their body is no longer theirs and they are eager for baby to make an appearance. If the due date is looming, or perhaps it has passed, their patience might be running out and so they look for ways to induce labour naturally.

A hypnobirthing course will teach you a number of tips and tricks to help you do that. None of these are harmful to you or your baby, so giving them a go is totally fine, but remember sometimes babies don't pay any attention to your impatience and they will keep you waiting a little bit longer...

For labour to begin, the conditions need to be ripe. Just think of our friends in the animal kingdom. They give birth when:

- *nature decides that their baby is ready*
- *they are in a safe space*
- *when they know they will be uninterrupted*

We humans need to have this reassurance too. So a mum needs to feel ready — not only emotionally, but in every other sense too — and she will probably want to be close to home as the estimated due date approaches, reassured that what she needs for labour and birth is close by.

What starts labour off is still a bit of a mystery. There are various theories out there, but what the definitive trigger is, is still unclear.

However, when all is well, a spontaneous labour tends to come on gradually. The contractions are short in duration, spaced far apart and not too regular. As time passes and labour progresses, the contractions last longer, become more frequent and regular, and the intensity is likely to build.

For some women, spontaneous labour starts before their babies have reached full

term and of course worries will immediately surface as to why this has happened and what will unfold. The best course of action in this situation is to get to hospital and let the professionals keep an eye on you and your baby.

Worrying too much and holding on to tension will not allow your body to work efficiently and help your baby descend. There are a number of ways to help you stay relaxed and comfortable, which enable your body to work powerfully and help birth your baby with more ease, such as breathing techniques and visualisations.

A hypnobirthing course will teach you these natural ways to stay relaxed, focused and comfortable in labour, to ensure that you are working with your body and your baby in the optimal way, and to help you have the best possible birth experience for the two of you. ☺



'I really enjoyed and valued our relaxation sessions and I would highly recommend hypnobirthing to everyone. It has common-sense techniques to help you relax and prepare for your labour. I loved it so much that I introduced a few ladies from my antenatal class after my first visit!'

Melanie, expectant mum

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Reason nine: Discover the best positions for labour and birth

If you have only been exposed to TV and films, I am sure that when you picture a woman giving birth to her baby, she is lying on a hospital bed with her legs akimbo, possibly in stirrups (argh, this makes my blood boil!). Get that image out of your head right now and tell your brain to obliterate it from your memory. This is absolutely the worst position for you to be in during labour and when you give birth to your baby.

In order to have an efficient labour, you need to work with your body as nature intended, rather than making it easy for the medical professional to keep their eye on you. Being on a bed will inhibit your body from easing your baby out, as you will constrict the flexibility of your pelvis.

Just imagine the following two scenarios:

In room A there is a woman who has gravitated immediately to her bed and she spent her whole labour lying down or sitting inclined on the bed. Her movements are extremely limited and she only moves when she feels uncomfortable and needs to reposition herself. Her baby is having to 'commando crawl' horizontally or at a slight incline out of her body.

In room B the bed has been moved to the side of the room, giving the mum space to walk around, bounce on a birthing ball and generally keep active during labour. Her baby is vertical at all times and gravity is working with her body to help ease her baby down. She has the ability to tip herself forward, which creates more space in the pelvic area, making it easier for her baby to descend.

Which of these two ladies do you think will labour more efficiently and calmly?

Your hypnobirthing teacher will spend a lot of time talking about this subject and making sure that you don't make the bed the crowning glory of your labour experience. They will share with you several positions, and things to do, to help make your labour efficient, calm and comfortable.

Whether you intend to birth at home, in a hospital or in a midwife-led unit, these



HELP MAKE YOUR LABOUR EFFICIENT,
CALM AND COMFORTABLE

positions and techniques are applicable to all settings — you are in control of your birth and your comfort.

So if you want to work with your body to help your baby descend efficiently into the birth canal and have a quicker labour, consider doing a hypnobirthing course: it will help you to understand the best positions for labour and birth and the logical reasoning behind them. ©



'During my second birth I spent a lot of time walking along the corridors of the hospital. In my room I paced, rocked back and forth and used the birthing ball to keep active throughout. The only time I used the bed was to give birth, and even then, I wasn't 'lying down' but on my knees and leaning over the back of the bed, giving me the freedom to keep mobile.'

Cristina, second-time mum

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Reason 10: How to use hypnobirthing for a Caesarean Section and/or a Vaginal Birth after a Caesarean Section (VBAC)

LET'S BUST SOME MYTHS:

- Once a Caesarean section (C-section), always a C-section — *Not true.*
- You risk having uterine rupture if you opt for a Vaginal Birth after a Caesarean Section (VBAC) — *True. However, less than 1% of VBAC women will suffer uterine rupture, so your risk is extremely low.*
- The risk of uterine rupture does not increase significantly if you have had multiple C-sections — *It increases marginally.*
- VBACs are not riskier than C-sections — *A Caesarean section is major surgery and complications can occur.*
- A C-section is safer for baby — *A Caesarean is not without risk to the baby. Babies are occasionally cut by the surgeon's scalpel. Babies who are born by Caesarean section have a higher rate of respiratory problems.*

Many women who are planning a C-section or whose pregnancy carries a greater probability of them being recommended to give birth via a C-section will think that a hypnobirthing course no longer applies to them and often think, 'What would I need it for?'

I hope you realise now after nine concrete reasons that a hypnobirthing course is not just about the breathing and visualisation techniques to help you through the progression of labour. It is a full antenatal course that openly talks about the options available to expectant mothers in late pregnancy, labour and birth. It gives them informed choice with unbiased information about the scenarios that most commonly occur in labour and birth, including a C-section and what it entails.

Couples who have been on a course are confident about the options that may arise on the day. With the training, they have already decided what they may choose or decline in their birth preferences (yet will keep an open mind should they need to alter their decisions on the day).

Through openly discussing the entire picture of late pregnancy, labour, birth and beyond, it soon becomes clear that the chances of having a C-section are quite unlikely. According to Birth Choice in the UK, around 25% of all pregnancies result in a C-section, with 15% of those being emergency C-sections.



IT'S ABOUT BEING ASSERTIVE,
INFORMED AND SUPPORTED, ALL
WITH A POSITIVE AND CALM OUTLOOK
TOWARDS LABOUR AND BIRTH

As for mums who have previously given birth via a C-section, if they are now seeking to follow the path of giving birth vaginally (a VBAC — Vaginal Birth after Caesarean Section), I strongly believe that they should be supported along the way, and only accept a C-section if nature deems otherwise, rather than being bamboozled with horror stories. Giving birth to a healthy baby is not *always* 'all that matters', as unhelpful friends, colleagues, family members and medical staff like to affirm: the mother's psychological well-being after this event is imperative too, and research suggests that mums feel better emotionally in the postnatal period when they were supported in their birth choices, whatever they were, *even if* they had to change path before or during the birth. Forcing a mum into a C-section isn't always the right answer (just like forcing her into a VBAC isn't) — empowering her (or, even better, the couple) to make her own decisions is what is essential.

During a hypnobirthing course, couples who have opted for an elective C-section:

- *are still provided with informed choice*
- *can still use the hypnobirthing scripts to connect with the baby during pregnancy*
- *will still benefit greatly from the fear release aspect of the course (knowing that a C-section is needed and that the date is looming can cause anxiety, for example)*
- *will still enjoy and benefit from being relaxed during pregnancy and birth, which in turn is beneficial for the baby*
- *can still use all the techniques (breathing, visualisations, affirmations, relaxation) on*

the day as they wait to go down to theatre, as they are prepped and when their baby is born

For couples who are planning a VBAC, the days leading up to labour might be an anxious time too. As always, it can simply be a fear of the unknown (as they haven't had a vaginal birth before and they won't know whether it was the right decision until they are on the other side), but there is also the additional stress of whether they will be supported in their decision all the way and the slightly higher risk of uterine rupture.

A hypnobirthing instructor's ultimate aim is to ensure that all their couples have the birth that is right for them. They want them to look back on their experience knowing that they made the best choices on the day and that they were listened to and supported. So regardless of where you choose to give birth and how your birth unfolds, hypnobirthing is about being assertive, informed and supported, all with a positive and calm outlook towards labour and birth.

Using hypnobirthing techniques in late pregnancy and labour will increase your chances of being calm and working with your body to birth your baby gently and efficiently, no matter what happens.

A positive birth is when a mother feels that she has the freedom of choice, has access to accurate information and is supported in her decisions. For a positive birth, she looks forward to labour and birth without anxiety or fear, and should there be twists or turns in her pregnancy or during labour, she confidently knows how to adapt. ©

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Conclusion

So here we are! You now have an understanding of what a hypnobirthing course entails and why and how it can be beneficial to a mum during late pregnancy, labour and birth. A hypnobirthing course also has a major positive impact on the baby, as all that the mum experiences, she passes on to him. So if her pregnancy and labour are calm and gentle, his experience of birth will be relaxed and peaceful too. What a fabulous way to be welcomed into this world!

The benefits of a hypnobirthing course for birth partners cannot be underestimated either. Whoever you choose to be with you at your baby's birth needs to have a clear understanding of what your hopes and wishes for this experience are. Without understanding and knowing, you can't expect them to help you in your time of need and vulnerability.

Don't be the person who looks back after her birth wondering whether she might have had a different experience if she had continued on a hypnobirthing approach. Be the person who wants to shout about her positive birth experience from the rooftop! Don't be the person who gets caught up on the conveyor belt of medical care, which is rigid with time-frames, tick boxes and red tape. Be the person who savours and enjoys her birth, without any rush. Just like a good meal, favourite drink or a relaxing massage — none of these should be done racing against the clock!

A hypnobirthing course is about relaxation and breathing techniques, as well as visualisations and positive birth affirmations. It is an all-round course that teaches everything that an expectant mother and her birth partner need to know about late pregnancy, labour, birth and beyond — from the physical changes that occur in a mother's body as pregnancy comes to an end and as it prepares for labour, through to what a woman can expect to happen in labour and birth, as well as how to care for a newborn (if you do your course with Magical Baby Moments).



HYPNOBIRTHING IS A DOWN-TO-EARTH AND SIMPLE APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING PREGNANCY AND LABOUR AS A NATURAL PROCESS

Many people assume that their labour will follow a certain path, yet no two births are the same and labour does not always unfold the way that they would like it to; so in a hypnobirthing course you learn to have an open mind and be ready to embrace the other possible scenarios, should they arise. The content is broad and deep and topics are discussed in detail; so that all participants are confident with the terminology, the benefits, risks and alternatives that each choice presents. Thanks to this in-depth preparation, if the time should come, they will feel confident about which interventions/procedures are right for them and their baby. They will also know that saying 'no' is an option too.

A hypnobirthing course should also allay any fears or preconceptions that a couple may have, so that upon completing the classes, the lasting feelings that they will take away with them are confidence, excitement and anticipation for the arrival of their precious baby.

This book has taught you what the benefits of hypnobirthing are – whoever you are and whatever circumstances may be applicable to you – and it has provided you with 10 great reasons why you should look for your nearest hypnobirthing instructor and book onto a course. If you prefer doing an online course, visit www.magicalbabymoments.com.

Hypnobirthing mothers often say that they had a calm, comfortable birth — usually without the need for medical intervention — where they welcomed their baby with ease, confidence and happiness.

If this sounds like something you would like too, get in touch! I wish you a positive birth experience, whatever you decide. Every woman deserves the birth that is right for her. ☺

COURSE DISCOUNT

If you want to book onto a course with Magical Baby Moments, quote 10Reasons for a 10% discount.

■ If you want to ask me any questions, to book onto a course or to share your birth story, please email me at: classes@magicalbabymoments.com.

Glossary

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a complementary medicine in which fine needles are inserted in the skin at specific points along what are considered to be lines of energy (meridians). Acupuncture is beneficial in all stages of pregnancy. Later in pregnancy, acupuncture is useful in alleviating pregnancy-related aches, anxiety and stress. Acupuncture is also well known for helping turn breech babies into the optimal position for birth. Regular acupuncture treatments towards the end of pregnancy will help prepare the body for labour and can even start labour. These treatments have been shown to encourage an efficient labour by reducing the amount of time spent in labour and the level of medical interventions. Be sure to find an acupuncturist with prenatal experience.

Birth canal

The birth canal is the passage through which the baby is expelled during labour. The birth canal is formed when the cervix dilates during birth.

Birth partner

This is your person (people) of choice to be by your side supporting you through labour and birth. It can be the father of the baby,

a family member or a close friend. Some couples also hire a doula (see below).

Birth plan/preferences

Expectant mothers are encouraged to write down their preferences for how they would like to experience birth. There are a number of factors to consider, such as venue, preferred pain-relief options, positions for labour, place for birth (on land, in a birth pool etc.) and what you want to happen to your baby in his or her first hour post-birth. Your midwife and hypnobirthing instructor will help you with these considerations.

Birthing ball

Birthing balls and gym balls are basically the same thing. They are an aid for pregnancy and labour and they come in different sizes. Check that your ball is well inflated so that your knees are lower than your hips. Ways to use your birth ball during labour include:

- > Sitting astride the ball and rocking your pelvis from side to side or back and forth.
- > Kneeling on the floor and leaning on your birthing ball.
- > Similar to the position above, but this time from a standing position, lean over your ball, with the ball on the bed or another surface.

Birth pool

Birth pools can be plumbed into the birth suite and made of hard material (like your bath tub at home), or they can be free-standing pools — usually made of hard plastic or inflatable like a paddling pool. Women choose to use birth pools for relaxation and pain-relief during labour, or as the environment in which they want to give birth.

Cervix

The cervix is the narrow neck-like passage forming the lower end of the uterus.

Caesarean section (C-section)

Caesarean delivery — also known as a C-section — is a surgical procedure used to deliver a baby through incisions in the mother's abdomen and uterus. An emergency C-section is performed when either the mother or baby is compromised during labour. An elective C-section is planned for during antenatal care.

Contraction

A contraction during labour is a shortening of the uterine muscles occurring at intervals before and during birth. The mother will feel the uterus tighten during this period. In hypnobirthing, it is also known as a 'surge'.

Counting the kicks

Most women begin to feel their baby move around 16–24 weeks of pregnancy. A baby's movement can be described as anything from a flutter to a roll or kick. Counting the kicks (movements) of your baby on a daily basis is a simple way of assuring yourself that he or she is fine.

It is not necessarily true that babies move less towards the end of pregnancy. If you think your baby's movements have slowed down or stopped, you can drink a really cold glass of water and see if your baby reacts to this. If you still feel that he or she hasn't moved, contact your midwife, maternity unit or local hospital immediately.

➔ www.countthekicks.org

➔ www.kickscount.org.uk

Doula

A doula gives emotional and physical support, help and information to women during pregnancy and during and after the birth.

Due date

In the UK, the due date is calculated by adding 280 days (40 weeks) to the first day of your last menstrual period. However, note that this is just an *estimated* due date: only 4% of babies arrive on their due date.

The baby will usually make an appearance between 37 and 42 weeks.

Endorphins

Endorphins are hormones that are secreted within the brain and nervous system that have pain-relief properties. In natural labour, they help the mother relax and feel less pain, in particular during surges.

Fully dilated

The first stage of labour begins when you start having contractions that cause incremental changes in your cervix, and ends when your cervix is fully dilated at 10cm.

Hypnobirthing scripts

These are passages that have been specifically written for expectant mums to help them visualise and imagine preparing for a calm and gentle birth. Hypnosis scripts allow you to go deeper into a state of relaxation, reduce stress and eliminate fears about birth.

Induction/induced labour

An induced labour is one that is started artificially, usually in the hospital maternity unit. Contractions can be started by

inserting a tablet (or pessary) or gel into the vagina. This is not always effective so other interventions may be offered, including breaking your waters (artificial rupture of membranes), and often a hormone drip (synthetic oxytocin) is needed to start or/and speed up the labour. It can sometimes take 24 to 48 hours to get you into labour.

Midwife/midwives

A midwife is a medical professional who specialises in pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and newborn care.

Midwife-led unit/birth centre

This is a birth place that is not necessarily linked to a hospital. The aim of a birth centre is to offer women a place for normalised care during childbirth. To give birth here, women usually need to meet certain criteria.

Obstetrician

An obstetrician is a doctor who specialises in pregnancy, childbirth and a woman's reproductive system. Although other doctors can deliver babies, many women see an obstetrician. Your obstetrician can take care of you throughout your pregnancy and will be there for mothers and babies that need extra care during childbirth.

Oxytocin

A mother naturally produces this hormone to help labour start and to maintain regular contractions. The other times when our body produces oxytocin is when we laugh, when we are happy and content, and when we make love.

Pain-relief (in labour)

There are two forms of pain-relief in labour: natural and artificial. Natural options include hypnobirthing, breathing techniques, visualisations, meditation, taking a bath, using a TENS machine and other self-help tools to enable you to relax. Some women prefer drugs to help alleviate the pain; this may be in the form of gas and air (nitrous oxide, also known as one of the brand names 'Entonox'), diamorphine, pethidine or an epidural.

Reflexology

Reflexology is a form of massage used to relieve tension and treat illness, based on the theory that there are reflex points on the feet, hands, and head linked to every part of the body. It is very safe, but most practitioners will not perform procedures on a pregnant woman during the first 13 weeks of her pregnancy. Many women choose to have reflexology in late pregnancy to

encourage labour to start. Be sure to find a reflexologist with prenatal experience.

Spontaneous labour

This is when the body naturally goes into labour without any medical intervention.

Surge

See 'contraction'.

TENS Machine

TENS stands for Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation. A TENS machine is a hand-held device that has two cables, each of which leads to two electrode patches. Two patches are placed on the woman's back on her bra line and two in line with her pelvis. These patches send out continuous mild electrical impulses that trigger the brain to release endorphins (nature's own painkillers). During a surge (contraction), the woman presses the boost button to send more impulses out through the patches, which helps the brain release more endorphins. This offers comfort to the labouring woman.

Uterus

The uterus, also known as the womb, is a hollow muscular organ of the female

reproductive system. The foetus grows in the uterus during pregnancy. It is an incredibly strong organ, able to contract forcefully to push a full-term baby out of the body during birth.

Vaginal birth

This is when the baby is born through the mother's vagina, as opposed to being born by Caesarean section.

Vaginal Birth after a Caesarean Section (VBAC)

A vaginal birth after a Caesarean section is also known as a VBAC (pronounced 'vee back'). Vaginal birth has physical as well as psychological benefits for both mum and baby, and women who are pregnant after a previous Caesarean may want to experience a vaginal birth.

Vitamin K

Vitamin K is usually administered to babies after birth to reduce the chances of hemorrhaging. If parents choose for their baby to have Vitamin K this can be administered via an injection or orally.

RESOURCES

ONLINE

Association for Improvements in Maternity Services (AIMS)

www.aims.org.uk

Birth Choice UK

www.birthchoiceuk.com

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby

FURTHER READING

The Association for Improvements in Maternity Services (AIMS) provides a number of unbiased, evidence-based factual booklets:

- Am I Allowed?
- Inducing Labour: Making Informed Decisions
- Birthing Your Baby: The Second Stage
- Birthing Your Placenta: The Third Stage
- Breech Birth – What Are My Options?
- Birth after Caesarean
- Caesarean Birth – Your Questions Answered
- Safety in Childbirth
- Group B Strep Explained
- Vitamin K and the Newborn

BOOKS

- *The Calm Birth School: The Practical Guide for Modern Mamas to Create a Calm, Positive Hypnobirth* by Suzy Ashworth
- *Why Hypnobirthing Matters* by Katrina Berry
- *Childbirth without Fear: The Principles and Practice of Natural Childbirth* by Grantly Dick-Read
- *Ina May's Guide to Childbirth* by Ina May Gaskin
- *The Hypnobirthing Book* by Katharine Graves
- *HypnoBirthing* by Marie Mongan

BIRTH EXPERIENCE SURVEY

*In May 2017, Magical Baby Moments carried out a Birth Experience Survey among the mums who had been on its Hypnobirthing course. * Here are some of its findings:*

☉ 80% of the women went into spontaneous labour, with 20% being induced.

☉ 60% gave birth in a labour ward in hospital, 20% in a birth centre and 20% at home.

☉ The following forms of pain relief were the most helpful:

- *Epidural*
- *Pethidine*
- *TENS machine*
- *Birth Pool*
- *Hypnobirthing*

☉ The following techniques were found to be most useful:

- *Massage*
- *Active birth positions*
- *Birth pool for relaxation and/or birth*
- *Up breathing*

☉ 60% of the babies were born vaginally with no medical assistance (i.e. not with the aid of forceps or ventouse) and 40% by emergency C-section (no elective C-sections were reported).

☉ In the first hour after birth, the following took place:

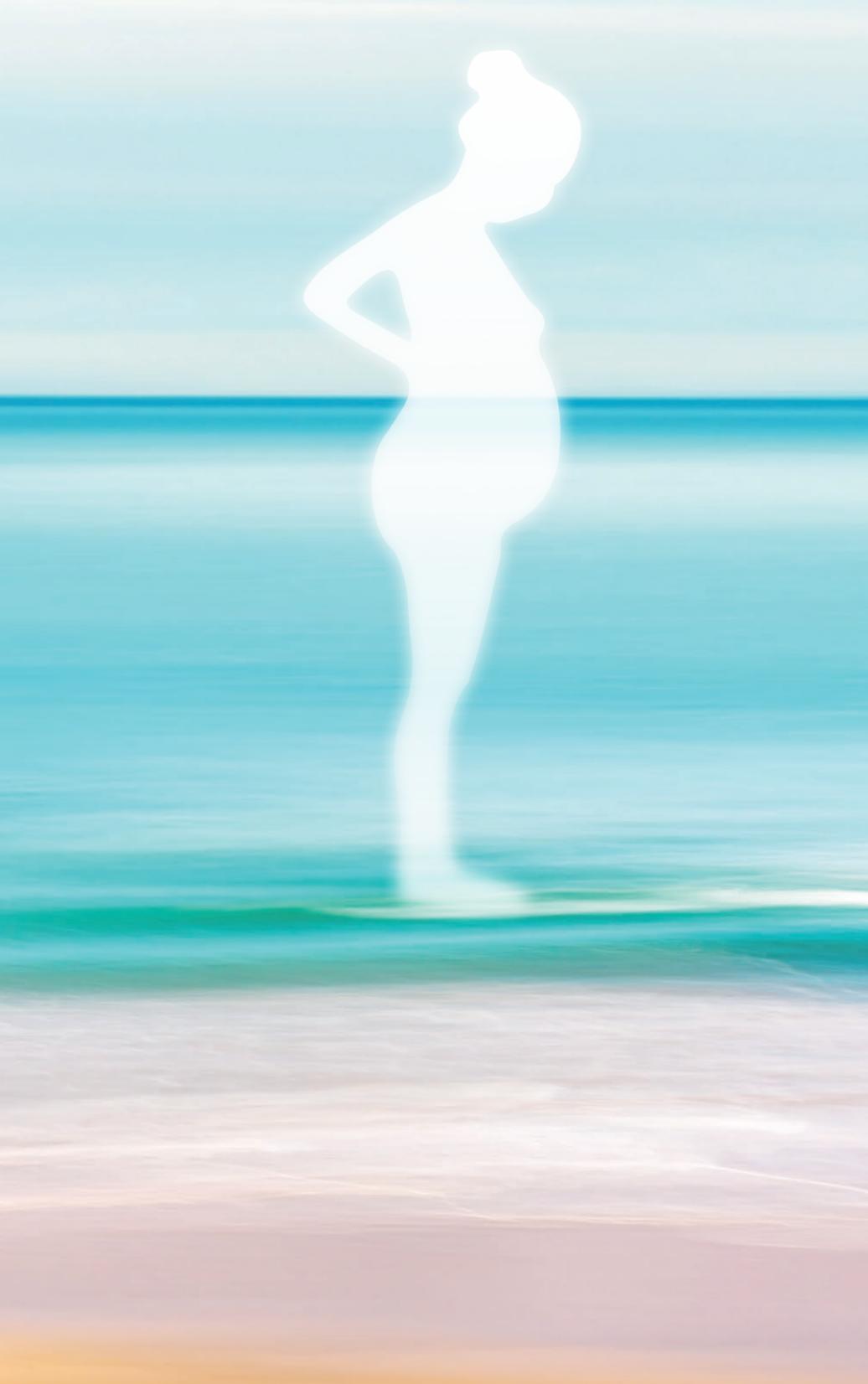
- *80% of the mothers had skin-to-skin contact with their baby (20% of the birth partners also had skin-to-skin)*
- *80% breastfed their babies during this time*
- *100% of parents opted to have Vitamin K by injection for their baby*
- *20% were given Synthetic Oxytocin (to aid the placenta's detachment from the uterus)*

☉ Respondents used the following words to describe their birth experience:

- *Calm (100%)*
- *Supported (80%)*
- *Informed (60%)*
- *Confident (40%)*
- *Comfortable (20%)*
- *Relaxed (20%)*
- *Traumatic (20%)*

Nobody chose the words; anxious, uninformed, neglected, uncomfortable, stressful or beautiful.

☉ All respondents said that they would recommend hypnobirthing to other expectant mums.



THE POWER OF HYPNOBIRTHING

10 REASONS WHY IT'S FOR YOU

- ✿ Hypnobirthing techniques are powerful! However, hypnobirthing is still not a mainstream option for antenatal classes and many people are put off by the word itself.
- ✿ This book explains 10 indisputable reasons why hypnobirthing is the most effective birth preparation course. You will discover not only how it informs you about everything you need to know about late pregnancy, labour and birth, but that it also shows the importance of choosing the right birth partner and educating them to be able to support you in the correct way during this amazing and miraculous journey.
- ✿ If you are looking to achieve the birth that you want, but you feel that you don't have all the information, resources and confidence to pursue this, this book will show you that a hypnobirthing course will help pull all these elements together, so that you can create the positive birth experience that we all ultimately want.



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Pregnancy and childbirth



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