

# **HYPNOBIRTH THERAPY, THE ANSWER TO PAIN FREE LABOUR?**

**BY AMANDA GWYNNE LONG**

Women are becoming more aware of their choices in childbirth today, and no longer want to be a passive participant in their pregnancy and labour. The increasing number of caesarean sections and medicalisation of what should be a natural process, has encouraged the search for a more natural alternative to a pain and stress free labour. Hypnobirth therapy is based on research carried out in the 1920's by British Obstetrician Dr. Grantly Dick-Reid. His theory is that it is panic and fear that makes childbirth particularly painful. Therefore, reducing the fear that women experience about giving birth will make labour easier and less painful.

## **What is hypnosis**

Hypnosis induces by suggestion a feeling of deep relaxation and well-being, whilst your mind remains alert and aware of your surroundings. It allows access to the subconscious mind which knows how to give birth without fear and anxiety. Ok. let's deal with the misconceptions. Hypnobirth therapy does not involve a scary therapist standing in front of you swinging a pendulum in front of your eyes. Hypnosis is a safe and natural therapy similar to day dreaming, which we all do naturally ourselves.

## **What's involved**

During pregnancy women are taught deep breathing techniques, which enables them to breath in rhythm with their contractions. Using hypnosis, visualisations, relaxation techniques, bonding, glove anaesthesia and self hypnosis enable women to relax and de-sensitise the fear of giving birth. Culturally, we are programmed to believe childbirth will be painful, whereas African and Indian women give birth with less fear and trauma.

Teaching self-hypnosis in pregnancy allows women to use these techniques to prepare for labour and birth without stress! Self-hypnosis can reduce the need for chemical pain relief and stimulate the release of the body's own natural painkillers called 'endorphins'. Pain relieving techniques such as 'glove anaesthesia' can aid a pain free labour and birth. The effect of using hypnosis as a means of relaxation and pain relief in labour has been widely researched. In a well-known study, published in the British Medical Journal, on seventy subjects treated by hypnosis, the duration of labour was considerably reduced and nearly 60 per cent of women required no pain relieving drugs.

## **When can hypnosis be used**

Hypnosis can be used throughout pregnancy to enhance well-being, reduce tiredness and alleviate morning sickness. Dr. Martin P. Williams, a member of the British Hypnotherapy Association and founder of the Hyponatal program for painless childbirth, says 'When using hypnosis in early pregnancy in most cases within one or two sessions, feelings of nausea and sickness subside...'

Research has shown that hypnosis may be of value in the treatment of breech presentation (Mehl, 1994). One hundred women with a breech presentation at 37 and 40 weeks of pregnancy were matched with a comparison group with similar obstetric and social histories. The experimental group received hypnosis which included suggestion therapy and relaxation. The therapy was provided until cephalic version occurred (breech turned to head down) or the mother delivered. The outcome of the research was significant, with 84% of the hypnosis group achieving a cephalic presentation (head down). In comparison only 48% achieved cephalic presentation in the control group. The conclusion was that hypnosis could

successfully treat women with a breech presentation, providing they were suitably motivated.

Classes generally start at about 30 weeks gestation. Groups are kept small enough to ensure that individual needs are met and techniques mastered so that you leave feeling confident in your ability to give birth using Hypnobirth therapy. Individual tuition is also available for those who prefer a 'one to one' session.

### **Hypnobirth Therapy Benefits**

- It may help reduce pregnancy niggles like sickness and tiredness, especially in early pregnancy.
- A more relaxed and enjoyable pregnancy.
- May shorten the first stage of labour by several hours.
- Eliminates, or reduces the need for chemical painkillers during labour.
- There is no depression of circulatory or respiratory function in either mother or child.
- Less fatigue during labour with easier resolution in the event of a complication.
- A calm and controlled birth experience for mother and baby.
- An involved and integral role for the birthing partner.
- Promotes bonding between mother, baby and birthing partner.
- More rapid postnatal recovery
- Less problems breast feeding.
- Content baby who feeds and sleeps well.

### **Case study**

Julie Tucker, 35 is 32 weeks pregnant and mum to Brandon aged 18months. 'I only had gas and air during my last labour but during this pregnancy I began to feel somewhat apprehensive about giving birth, so I decided to try hypnotherapy. During my sessions Amanda helped me to visualise the three stages of labour progressing normally with minimum discomfort. She encouraged me to imagine my cervix opening up like a beautiful flower to full dilatation. Then I visualised the birth itself progressing in a calm and normal manner followed by a natural delivery of the placenta. We even covered breastfeeding and bonding with the baby. The relaxation part was absolutely great, I managed to relax so much that I felt I was asleep yet totally aware'.

### **Case study**

Fiona and her husband came to see me when Fiona was 35 weeks pregnant. She wanted a natural birth using a minimum of pain relief and intervention. She was very motivated and positive with much support from her husband. She used self hypnosis and the CDs every day until she went into labour. This is what she said

'I did your Cd Sun early afternoon and then cleaned the bathroom. Late afternoon I had a 'show' followed by mild contractions. I listened to your CD again but thought that labour wouldn't start until a few days after the 'show'. My husband persuaded me to contact the hospital and I went in for a wee examination, leaving my bag in the car, because I truly thought I would be going home. I had some discomfort but felt very calm and relaxed. The midwife was astounded that I was 7-8cm dilated, and going nowhere! Baby was born easily by a spontaneous normal vaginal delivery (svd) 5 hours later. I have to say that I found my labour like a walk in the park. Even the breast feeding went like a dream!

### **Conclusion**

Hypnotherapy is a gentle, safe and effective therapy which has been used as a natural healing technique for centuries. Hypnosis can offer a woman the tools such as self hypnosis,

visualisation, breathing and relaxation techniques to help her achieve her goal of natural childbirth. This therapy works in a positive way, reducing fear and promoting women's confidence in their ability to give birth naturally and easily.

**Reference:**

Mehl L. 1994 Hypnosis and conversion of the breech to vertex presentation. *Archives of Family medicine* 3, 10:881

**Highland Holistic Therapies**: Contact; Amanda Gwynne Long, Midwife, Complementary therapist and Hypnotherapist for further information and details of classes. Antenatal relaxation Cd and Preparation for childbirth CDs are also available. Tel: **07818 415516**. Website: [www.highlandholistics.co.uk](http://www.highlandholistics.co.uk)