

Childbirth

by Andrea Aro

Why Women Should Trust In Their Body...

Since becoming a mum back in 2001, I've spoken to many women who, sadly, find the thought of childbirth absolutely terrifying. Such real fear and anxiety coming across, at a time that should be full of curious anticipation, hope and joy.

And then, there are those women (the "too posh to push" brigade) who anticipate the event will be so traumatic and incredibly painful, that they opt out of the most wonderful experience you could ever go through, and put themselves through a major operation.

I have also found that some mothers that experience difficulties during labour, are all too eager to share them with new mothers-to-be, which, I'm afraid, isn't very helpful. It just goes to fuel anxiety, rather than to reassure.

So I urge all those women that have had really positive labour experiences, to please broadcast them from the roof tops! It's fairly rare to hear such stories, because, I suspect in our current world of sensationalism, they'd seem rather boring.

There are parts of the world, that are exiled from our Western negative sensationalism. Places exist where women are taught that childbirth is swift, natural and pain will be fairly gentle, and certainly bearable. And, with the exception of any genuine complications, this is how mothers experience the event. So please be aware - words can punch a powerful blow. If you think about it, words alone, have proved enough to start wars. Were weapons of mass destruction ever found...? So please choose words carefully around pregnant women! Be encouraging.

I had a fairly short labour with my daughter. I think that I was lucky not to be surrounded by negativity. My mother had two straightforward, short and wonderful experiences of labour. I didn't ever consider that I wouldn't either. I didn't have any drug intervention for pain. I did try gas and air towards the end, but didn't realise, until after my daughter was born, that it hadn't been working the whole time! I certainly wasn't trying to be heroic or trying to prove something. I wasn't. It just hadn't occurred to me to be scared.

In our hectic 21st Century lives, we don't give ourselves time to fully relax. Time to let our bodies rest and recuperate. As a result, we hold on to a lot of stress/tension/anxiety. In lots of cases tight, tense, painful muscles are a symptom of the stressful lives we lead. Now take a moment and notice your shoulders now, and then lower them and relax! Chances are, that you were tensing them up, without even noticing. When you go into labour and you keep your muscles tense with anxiety, it makes the whole process that more arduous. It really doesn't need to be so. Women can learn to be relaxed about the whole process and trust that their body knows exactly what to do.

We don't give a second thought to blinking, do we? No. It's an automatic process that the body carries out unconsciously. We don't give a second thought to the pumping muscular action of

the heart, keeping the blood flowing around the body. Another automatic function. There are hundreds, probably thousands of automatic processes that go on second by second, day by day, year by year and we never give them a second thought. We trust that our body knows what it's doing.

Well, childbirth (unless there is a genuine complication) is just another one of these automatic processes. A woman's body is designed to perform the function. And it really doesn't need to be long and traumatic.

There is much emphasis on pain control and possibly not enough on the actual mechanics of what the body does during labour. When we do know, the fear of the unknown deminishes. So by being educated in how the body does what it does, our anxieties will reduce and we can feel more relaxed, which in turn, allows it to function that more effectively and efficiently.

We spend time preparing ourselves to grow the baby well by avoiding certain foods, attempting to eat more healthily, taking nutritional supplements, staying fit, oh and rubbing in anti-stretch mark cream! How much time do we give ourselves to prepare mentally and emotionally? Little I suspect. I get the sense that lots of women block out the inevitable labour day from their minds, because the thought of labour terrifies them.

A positive mental attitude really is key, not only in childbirth, I hasten to add; in every aspect of life. If you learn to focus on the positive, rather than the negative, you'll find that you'll be surprised at how much easier life becomes! If you expect the best outcome, then there is a big chance that the outcome will be great!

I stumbled across hypnotherapy a few years ago and I found that my intrigue and curiosity led me to train as a hypnotherapist! There are a variety of ailments that can be cured with the use of therapeutic hypnosis, but the driving force behind my motivation to train was that I wanted to help women learn how they can cope during labour, making it a happy experience to remember, not a traumatic one. Using hypnosis, it is possible to learn how to be strong mentally, and confident about labour. By rehearsing what the body is doing during labour, whilst in a hypnotic trance, it becomes familiar to us. Like anything in life, once you've done something once, the subsequent occasions will be that much easier. The old adage, "practise makes perfect" rings true.

However, it's a bit tricky to practise childbirth in order to make it perfect! Or so you would think. We all have the ability of being able to practise in our mind. Imagination is such a wonderful tool. During a hypnotic trance, mums-to-be are taken through an imaginary childbirth experience. This kind of tricks us. Even though we haven't tackled it physically yet, the neural pathways have been created. So by practising over and over during hypnosis, we

can get our mind and body working together. It's a bit like driving to a town you've never been to. You will undoubtedly need a map to help you get there without getting lost. On subsequent visits, the need to refer to the map will diminish as you get to know the route!

It is possible to learn techniques that will help you to control the amount of discomfort you experience with each contraction and that contractions aren't your body's attempt at punishment, but serve a purpose. With each contraction, you are one step closer to achieving the goal.... meeting your baby face-to-face for the first time!

There are also techniques that can be used during hypnosis that can de-traumatise past childbirth experiences or even perceptions of what childbirth can be like. Making the mother feel much more relaxed and reassured.

Hypnosis is by its very nature, very relaxing. The more relaxed a woman in labour can remain, the more comfortable labour will be. Self hypnosis can be learnt and used whenever appropriate to recreate wonderful calm feelings.

Other advantages of using hypnosis include:

- Helping couples slow to conceive
- Lowering fear and anxiety
- Assisting in reducing high blood pressure
- Alleviating morning sickness
- Lessening pain
- Reducing the need for pain medication
- Giving a sense of control of contractions
- Reducing delivery time
- Enabling mother to be physically and mentally alert, not exhausted, afterwards
- Speeding up healing

Above all, hypnotherapy can help women to have the kind of childbirth experience they deserve – one that is full of excitement, joy and, above all, happiness.