



More and more islanders are considering alternative birthing methods, a popular method for 2014 was birthing using hypnosis appropriately entitled **hypno birthing**.

The question on everyones lips is does it work and is it possible to have a pain free birth?

Mark Shields interviews hypnobirthing expert Jill Yarrow to find out

It has been almost eleven years since my son was born and at the time, my wife Karen was keen to find a less stressful way of giving birth to our second child as the first had been quite a painful ordeal for her. She booked us into a hypnobirthing class which opened both our eyes into how hypnotherapy can help reduce anxiety during child birth. Karen's description after the drug-free birth was that it was pain free, almost euphoric and she had a sense of complete control over the welcoming of our child to the world. It sounded like the perfect birth.

Now as a man I will never begin to understand the experience that women go through so this month I have asked one of our Life Practice therapists, Jill Yarrow to take a look into Hypnobirthing and how this therapy can work for women looking for an alternative birthing experience.

Self Hypnosis

I remember giving birth to my first child. I had been in labour for over 24 hours and every time I had a labour pain, I gripped the bedpost behind me for dear life and in blind panic. My Doctor examined me and told me that if I didn't relax, I'd never have the baby. My mother visited me that afternoon and following her advice, (she'd had 9 children), I did as she instructed. She advised me to visualise a hula hoop around the top of my tummy and every time I had a pain, I should concentrate on the hula hoop and feel it as it worked its way down my body. What wise words she gave me! My baby was born a few hours later.

By concentrating on something other than my pain, my labour progressed much more quickly and with less pain or distress. This was my first experience of selfhypnosis and one of the reasons why I become interested in the mind body connection. I don't suppose my mother had any idea that she was teaching me self-hypnosis but after having 9 children herself, had apparently become quite adept at pain management!

Mind and Body Connection

How often have you heard your friends, especially new parents, give detailed descriptions of the birth of their child? For some it is a beautiful and amazing experience but sadly for others, it can be a horror story! But it needn't be. It's true, unprepared complications do sometimes arise but they are swiftly dealt with by expert medical care. The fact is, birthing is a unique experience for each mother but depending on your perception of childbirth and whichever story you have listened to, it can have very different outcomes.

In his book, *Childbirth Without Fear* (1942), English Obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read introduced the idea of using hypnotherapy for childbirth. He noted that we were the only species which experienced extreme discomfort in childbirth. He acknowledged the mind body connection and also the connection between fear and pain. The most common external factors that can cause anxiety are fear, stress and tension.

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Stepping into the unknown

For first time mums, it can be the fear of pain or just an anxiety of not knowing what is going to happen. They will, of course, have been given birthing instruction by their midwives at their antenatal classes, but there is still that unknown quantity. First time mums will find themselves in the centre of a situation that they have had no actual experience of and nothing their conscious mind can relate to, hence creating an underlining anxiety. So, it's hardly surprising then, that first time mums may be fearful.

However, this anxiety has a knock-on physiological effect by tightening the very muscles that are meant to be relaxed during labour to ensure a relatively pain-free easy delivery and an enjoyable birth. Fear of childbirth has led to Mums being too 'push to push' and instead opting for selective caesarean section, ultimately denying themselves the beauty of a natural birth. There is another option however...Hypno-birthing.

Here comes the science part

If you are tense or nervous during labour, stress hormones can re-direct blood flow to your limbs, heart and brain creating the 'fight or flight' reaction and this creates a physiological change in your body. Your body's sympathetic nervous system is then activated due to a release of hormones and it stimulates the adrenal glands triggering the release of catecholamines which include adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones flood the body and results in an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate and makes you hyper-vigilant and in a heightened state of alertness, creating a contradiction to the muscles which need to be relaxed during childbirth.

Hypno-birthing explains why our minds react this way and how to counteract this with a combination of breathing techniques to reduce the focus on pain and also how to use the breath to relax the muscles. It incorporates self-hypnosis, relaxation and visualisation techniques and positive thinking to induce a state of calmness, enabling new mums to free themselves of the limiting thoughts and emotions that lead to the fear of pain and which will potentially reduce the pain in labour for an easier, more comfortable birth.

Hypno-birthing facilitates a better understanding of how the uterus and muscles function naturally during childbirth and helps mums to narrow their focus which will reduce their awareness of that fear, pain and anxiety and assist them to be in control of the sensations that naturally accompany childbirth. In this calm state endorphins, the body's natural relaxant, replaces the stress hormones that constrict and cause the pain.

Hypno-births have a reputation for being quicker and easier and decreasing the need for epidurals and other pain management drugs. Hypno-birthing is ever increasing in popularity throughout the UK and is being shown that childbirth can be a gentle, positive and calm experience, not just for you and your baby but also for your partner. What a beautiful start for a new family!

A useful tool for life

Even greater benefits are that the skills learned are transferable and can be used over and over again, not just in childbirth but for pain management, stress management and relaxation. Karen says she now uses it when she feels anxious in the dentist's chair and she encourages the children to use the skill too. In fact, it's a life skill that you can use throughout your life, how great is that!

I went on to have 2 more natural births with no stitches, no pharmaceutical drugs, just the odd whiff of gas and air and a damp flannel. If we can observe our thoughts without taking on board any learnt behaviour or knowledge, we can look at them non-judgementally and choose how we react to them, not how we think we should react. What we learn, so can we unlearn. So, kick that fear or preconceived idea out of your mind, it's only there if we allow it to be. Our minds and bodies are amazing, be innovative and explore your options, you might be amazed at your own potential and what you discover, I was!

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