

Exploring The Art of HypnoBirthing

Jessica Fenton looks at a different approach to childbirth.

Having been aware of the power of hypnosis in birthing when I was pregnant with our eldest son Leo 3 years ago I remember feeling genuinely intrigued by the whole concept.

After stumbling upon this interesting theory about how hypnosis could make a birth potentially 100% pain free in some cases and overall more gentle and positive, I went ahead and bought a book from Amazon, read it, and then practiced the techniques in the run up to my first birth with Leo.

However when the big day arrived, I was completely blown away by the overall intensity and didn't actually put into practice what I had read and learned. Tom had read the most important chapter and we practiced one or two breathing techniques in the run up, but as far as he was aware (and most dads think is the case), it was up to me to pretty much do it on my own and in a sense, hope for the best.

And the birth wasn't quite what was hoped for to say the least.

Fast forwarding 3 years, and I happen to be giving birth again around the end of January 2012

And this time I mean to have the birth I deserve, and which every woman in every part of the world should be expecting – relaxed, pain free and heck, why not even spiritually enhancing?

It makes sense that women should be in a deeply relaxed state (which also works towards this pain free concept) when birthing - completely undisturbed and fully present in the moment so I decided to re-visit this idea of hypnosis during child birth once again the second time around and this time I came across the person who I knew could really provide all the answers. A woman called Marie Mongan is the founder of the original Mongan Method HypnoBirthing® programme which started in North America in 1987 and is responsible for helping thousands of women to date to enjoy safer, easier and more comfortable birthing.

With this in mind and inspired by this discovery, Tom and I decided to attend a HypnoBirthing® course together so that we could both learn the in-depth programme in preparation for our second child. This is when we met Sonia Griffiths, a Clinical Hypnotherapist/NLP Practitioner and HypnoBirthing® Ante-Natal Educator that runs popular HypnoBirthing® courses for couples in East Sussex and London.

As a Biomedical Scientist and physical therapist Sonia admits that she felt sceptical about HypnoBirthing® until

she started seeing the results for herself.

“Seeing women who were in some cases petrified of giving birth transformed into calm, empowered women who were having amazing birth experiences really opened my eyes and my mind to just how amazing HypnoBirthing is.”

She soon decided that she wanted to train as a practitioner in order to teach this to as many people as possible to help them achieve calmer, more relaxed and even in some cases “pain” free births.

So at the 26 week mark, we cleared our minds of that horrible “p” word (pain) and set to uncover the secret, yet oh so obvious practice, of “HypnoBirthing®”.

The fact that we Western women have to seek out an alternative to the “accepted norm” and almost defy hospital mentality, let alone attend a course which offers a better way with its own name and meaning ie. HypnoBirthing® is testimony to the dire state that women in birthing society have come to find themselves. Fear overriding the body's natural ability to meet pain with its own anaesthesia and general lack of knowledge or forgetfulness that women were born to birth.

Our bodies are actually more than capable of a safe, calm and vaginal birth without medical intervention (unless of course it's “needed”) and this knowledge is sometimes a good and well needed reminder as I go through my final 6 weeks picturing a lovely birth and a “calm” and happy baby that doesn't experience any trauma as a result of our ‘positive’ thinking and preparations.

And this time Tom was well and truly with me, having read the Marie Mongan HypnoBirthing® book from back to front before the course even started.

About the course

The HypnoBirthing® course is a total of 12 hours and taught in a series of shorter sessions towards the end of a woman's pregnancy (Any time from 20 weeks onwards). Couples can opt for one to one lessons or be taught in small, intimate groups. Either way, it's just as important that the birthing partner attends so that the programme can be taught together and the birthing woman can be fully supported throughout her labour.

What Sonia hopes people get from her course....

“I hope that anyone that does this course really learns how important a calm, relaxed emotional state is for normal childbirth and that we are in control of our thoughts and emotions.”

She goes on to explain that “fear and stress are the ene-

mies of natural childbirth as they create the wrong physiological state for birth in other words they cause the fight or flight response which is the exact opposite place to where a birthing mum needs to be."

The programme in a nutshell, is a complete Ante-natal Preparation course that teaches physical and emotional preparation for birth along with some amazing breathing techniques, self-hypnosis, deep relaxation and anaesthesia techniques.

It was really good to be in a learning environment with other like minded couples who wanted their natural homebirths as much as we did - a far cry from our experiences of attending an NCT course (National Childbirth Trust) during our pregnancy with Leo.

Exercises, Breathing and Meditation

Early on in the course, Sonia ran us through a series of exercises to encourage us to let go of our fears that surround our thoughts about birth, which was helpful as I hadn't realised that I was holding onto so much from our previous birth experience. Once we had addressed these issues as couples, we could then start to move forward and understand the concepts of the programme.

Probably one of the most important parts of the course was to teach us the different breathing exercises that we are encouraged to adopt during the labour and birth process. It was invaluable to have a professional actually talk us through this and demonstrate the breathing activities to us, as opposed to reading blank text from a book and trying to learn it without guided support. And this is where we really went wrong last time.

We enjoyed a series of guided meditations throughout the workshops which were deeply relaxing and reminded us all of how incredibly powerful the mind actually is.

If you are holding onto anything that is stopping you from looking forward to your birth with anything other than joy and excitement then it's possible to have a one to one session with Sonia and work with Hypnosis to rectify this.

Although she says that "very few in fact come to see me for additional Hypnotherapy or fear release sessions. I have seen a few ladies to help them to turn breech presentations using hypnosis which has some excellent scientific data as to its success."

What we were shown

Tom doesn't enjoy watching other couples' births, although he was great at Leo's, so I was unsure as to how he might react when Sonia began playing us a video of some births where the couples were using HypnoBirthing® methods. The births were so beautiful and calm that there was nothing for anyone to feel uncomfortable about. We were really amazed at how natural and easy the births appeared and many of the women were claiming that that their experiences involved none or very little pain or discomfort. I found it really motivating to see these types of births as I'd been affected by watching programmes in the past like "One Born Every Minute", which seems to largely be about assisted hospital births with women screaming in pain and fear.

And Yep, there's homework to do after the course in preparation for the birth...

And the more you put in the more you are reassured to get out.

We were all given a copy of the book 'HypnoBirthing' (Souvenir Press, 2010) by Marie Mongan, along with two CDs to listen to on a regular basis; a relaxation CD and a daily birth affirmation CD. Each couple was also issued with their own file which was brimming with useful information and helpful workshop notes.

I've been practising the Sleep Breathing technique every night before going to sleep along with some of the additional visualisations that we learnt on the course. I have the daily affirmations CD in our car and Leo and I listen to it as we drive along most days. It's amazing how calm and relaxed it can make a wild 2 year old!! When he's heard enough he says "No more baby CD Mummy." However I'm finding the daily affirmations really positive and lovely to listen to. I enjoy having the words floating around in my head throughout the day and look forward to when we will meet our baby.

Our summarising verdict

Tom and I both thoroughly enjoyed experiencing the HypnoBirthing® course together. It was an extra opportunity to prepare as a couple for our forthcoming birth in January amidst a busy household and a whirlwind past few months after taking over the natural organic skincare company, Raw Gaia. We both enjoyed learning the techniques that we will be putting into practice, not only during the time of welcoming our baby into this world, but also within other aspects of our lives too.

Getting the birth we want

We're deeply manifesting an easy home birth and I'm personally going all out to try and make this happen... HypnoBirthing®, working out at Virgin Active 2- 3 times per week, training with my personal antenatal trainer once per week, employing an independent midwife to support us through our pregnancy, birth and postnatal period too in place of NHS care and making plans for a Lotus Birth will all combine to allow us the birth that we deserve. I'd like to experience the surges without intense pain and remain in control of what happens to our baby and me. And I'd like us to remain comfortable and in control throughout our birthing experience.

I'll let you know how we got on...

Natural parenting, attachment parenting, child led parenting, whatever you prefer to call it; it's all a similar thing and is fundamentally about fully respecting the child. My husband and I are passionate advocates of natural parenting and try our best to help raise our 2 and a half year old Leo, alongside nature in a wholesome way. We are calmly expecting our second child sometime in early 2012. Jessica's websites: www.NaturallyMummy.com, www.RawGaia.com, www.TotalRawFood.com

Tom and Jessica Fenton attended HypnoBirthing® with Sonia Griffiths BSc, MSc, MFHT. Tel: 01273 243435 / 07773 063273. www.sussexhypnobirthing.com Sussex HypnoBirthing® are the UK's longest serving practitioners. Sonia and her colleague Steve sit on the UK HypnoBirthing® Board to monitor training, and improve services within the UK. ☼