

# GOOD HEALTH

**HYPNOBIRTHING** CAN HYPNOTHERAPY REALLY LEAD TO PLEASURABLE AND STRESS-FREE CHILDBIRTHS?

## Love's labour-pains lost

**S**adie, Kate, Liz and Posh – the bump is this season's ultimate accessory. But what a down-payment. Searing pain, hours of agony and the tearing sinew of childbirth. Or need it be? HypnoBirthing, massive in America and storming Britain, believes a labour-free labour is the birthright of every mum. Childbirth that's pain-free, drug-free and – dare we say it – even pleasurable. Where do we sign?

Hypnotherapy is often used in pain management. When we experience fear, it causes tension in the body. This tension, in turn, can lead to pain. Remove the fear, and ipso facto, you remove the pain – whether it's a root canal or childbirth, so the theory goes.

To do this, HypnoBirthing reconditions the way pregnant women think about birth and gives them natural tools – from meditation and breathing to exercises – for shorter, drug-free and 'often' pain-free labours. Believe me, I've seen the videos. These are not women cursing through their contractions, but expectant mothers surrendering to 'surges' with a smile.

'In other cultures a pain-free birth is the norm,' explains Helianthe Rusken, a practitioner at London's HypnoClinic. 'In the UK, a culture of fear surrounds childbirth and influences our experience of it.' Actually, she argues, our bodies are incredibly equipped for the rigours of childbirth. The muscles of the uterus cushion and push the baby through, the pelvic floor softens and we get unlimited doses of endorphins – the body's natural anaesthetic. But fear is a great saboteur. When stressed, our

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adrenaline levels rise. We hyperventilate, mother and baby's heart rate start to race and we release catecholamines (stress hormones) – the opposite of endorphins. In short, fear fights our natural instincts.

To counter this, Helianthe uses hypnotherapy. Not of the Paul McKenna variety, hers is more like shallow meditation. Partners learn to be in a relaxed state, but one in which they are fully cognisant. In class, they practise fear-release (banishing negative images of painful labours), learn breath work for before and during the birth and attempt visualisations. Partners choose the techniques they are most comfortable with and add them to practical

exercises – Kegals routines for strengthening the pelvic floor, perineal massage, birthing positions and breath techniques.

The result? Thousands of testimonials each year from women who have experienced pain-free labours across the States. And reports of women breezing in to delivery rooms at 7cm dilated and giving birth in 40min flat.

Of course, HypnoBirthing has its detractors. Births, sceptics say, are not always pain-free (thus the 'often' pain-free prefix), and why should women feel guilty about requesting drugs? And, just think, if it does work, what would we have to bitch about at coffee mornings?

### INFORMATION

*Courses (four classes, two tapes and a HypnoBirthing manual) from £250, HypnoClinic. Tel: 0845 1080419, [www.hypnoclinic.net](http://www.hypnoclinic.net) For more information on HypnoBirthing, visit [www.hypnobirthing.com](http://www.hypnobirthing.com) For regional referrals, e-mail [distribution@hypnoclinic.com](mailto:distribution@hypnoclinic.com) with your location.*