



Hypnosis and Childbirth

How does hypnosis aid natural childbirth?

[Hypnosis](#) is increasingly being used to help women give birth with the minimum of pain, medical interventions and pain medication.

And while no-one should claim that hypnosis can create pain free childbirth, several landmark studies show significant improvement for women who learn [self hypnosis](#) before giving birth. So why should this be?

Natural childbirth: Body and mind working together

These days, the 'mind-body' link is well established. Everyone knows that what you think can affect the way you feel. This is a relatively recent development however, and it has not penetrated into some recesses of the healthcare profession.

Everyday mind-body interactions

Everyone has experienced being startled – the heart starting to pound, a funny sensation in the tummy, even tingling in the limbs. Of course, this is an automatic response to a perceived threat (the threat doesn't even have to be real!) As long as you *think* there is a threat, this is enough. And this is the point: even the imagination can cause the body to respond.

(In fact, the body can respond before you even become aware of what you are scared of, but that's another story!)

The [adrenaline](#) released at this time is a fast-acting and powerful hormone that activates this 'fight-flight' mechanism in the body, causing blood to flow away from the main organs to the limbs, stopping digestion and causing the heart to beat faster. It belongs to a group of hormones called catecholamines that help to keep the body on a high state of alert.

So the point is, the mind affects the body.

A natural childbirth will take place when the mind, and therefore the body is relaxed and comfortable as possible. [Anxiety](#) gets in the way of natural childbirth processes.

Anxiety affects the uterus and increases pain

If we are faced with a real threat then fear is a perfect response but if this system is activated by anxiety during childbirth it causes the uterus, which is engorged with oxygenated blood, to suffer cramp due to lack of the essential nutrients and oxygen as the blood gets drawn away.

In addition, if the mind believes there is a threat it will decrease the production of oxytocin, the hormone that produces contractions, so labour slows down to stop the baby being born when the environment isn't safe.

4 Major Benefits

Learning hypnosis gives mothers 4 key benefits:

1. More time during pregnancy is spent in a relaxed state, benefiting the baby.
2. The mother regularly rehearses being relaxed during childbirth, greatly increasing the chances of being actually more relaxed during the birth. This allows good blood flow to the uterus, reducing pain from cramping, and maintains the production of oxytocin, giving the body the message that it is safe to give birth.
3. She has access to real skills that she can use during the birth, to bring down her pain levels and put her more in control of the birth process.
4. The relaxed state stimulates her body to release endorphins, nature's painkillers.

Mothers who learn how to activate the calming side of their nervous system have the best chance of a safer, more relaxed, shorter, and enjoyable natural childbirth with less pain.

Accessing relaxation for childbirth through self-hypnosis

This bio-chemical dance is a natural part of being a woman, as long as it is allowed to function properly.

This system is interfered with by high levels of emotion such as anxiety. By deep relaxation through self-hypnosis we allow this automatic part to work unhindered.

Self hypnosis produces a calm and happy state which when accessed during childbirth helps the birth process to progress naturally. A relaxed mind tells the body all is well, enabling just the right balance of hormones to be produced and so optimising the effectiveness of the contractions that dilate the cervix and allow the baby to be born.

Article by Jill Wootton

Jill is a qualified hypnobirther and hypnotherapist (having trained with Uncommon Knowledge). She and her partner Steve Griffiths run regular Natural Childbirth workshops in Sussex, UK.

She has also created the '2nd nature birth programme – self hypnosis and childbirth preparation', which is a complete training course for mothers who want to learn self hypnosis to help them enjoy a more naturally and pain free childbirth.