



whether induced by a therapist, by listening to a CD or simply by relaxing and using well-practiced techniques. This alone reduces tension and creates a feeling of well-being and calm. Ante-natal hypnotherapy sessions enable pregnant women to fine tune this natural ability. With the guidance of a clinician, anyone can learn to use what is described as the 'hypnoreflexogenous protocol' to create a 'conditioned reflex'. Put simply, it is possible through hypnosis to prepare emotionally to remain in control of and respond confidently to the physical process of childbirth. So, women giving birth can overcome the 'fear-tension-pain' syndrome using self hypnosis to achieve the best possible outcome in their given circumstances. There are even examples of caesarean sections being carried out using hypnosis alone as anaesthetic. But this is at the extreme end of the spectrum of uses of hypnosis because of the degree of preparation required for a patient to undergo any kind of surgery in this manner.

All you have to do is Google 'HypnoBirthing' or 'hypnosis and childbirth' and you will find numerous clinical studies revealing to varying degrees, (but nonetheless, quite staggering) statistical success stories. Time after time you will find evidence of considerably shorter labours, particularly for primigravid women, with the first stage reduced by three hours or more. Typically, twice as many women using hypnosis require no pain medication and the majority deliver spontaneously without any surgical intervention. Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, higher Apgar scores are recorded for 'hypnobabies'. (Apgar-method used to measure newborns health)

What is clear from research findings is that hypnosis is a safe and effective way to decrease the perception of pain whilst increasing the ability to manage the sensations of labour. With plenty of practice, it is possible for some women to use self hypnosis to eliminate pain completely and experience only pressure during contractions. While not all of us can achieve this, we are all capable of decreasing our perception of pain and increasing our coping skills.

When tense, anxious or frightened, our bodies create a 'fight or flight' response. Animal research shows that, if threatened by predators, mammals will flood their bodies with 'fight or flight' chemicals to stop labour so they can get themselves and their babies to safety. This was also demonstrated during the Blitz when it was noted that women in labour would stop when air raid sirens went off only to start again after the raid was over. In a normal

environment, the 'fear-tension-pain' syndrome can create the same response, leading to prolonged labour, greater foetal distress and lower Apgar scores.

Conversely, self hypnosis creates a state of deep relaxation whilst fully aware, totally relaxed and in control. It generates feel-good endorphins, making it possible to maintain energy levels throughout the physically demanding process of childbirth. And the benefits don't stop there. Research reveals that mothers who deliver under hypnosis overwhelmingly report positive feedback on the whole experience. Complications are fewer and more pregnancies go to full-term. Partners are more engaged as they are involved in maintaining the right conditions for hypnosis to do its work and they do not have to experience seeing the mother of their child in extreme distress. Postpartum, these mums recover more quickly and are less susceptible to post natal depression.

Given all this evidence, it is my passionate belief that all parents-to-be should at least be made aware of the incredible power of hypnotherapy and have the opportunity to experience the advantages for themselves. HypnoBirthing is available in cities like Brighton and London and is gradually spreading into other areas.

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