

THE
HYPNOBIRTHING
BOOK



An inspirational guide for a calm, confident, natural birth

KATHARINE GRAVES

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Katharine Publishing

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*To Archie McIntyre,
the unsung hero of hypnobirthing*

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'According to physiological law, all natural functions of the body are achieved without peril or pain. Birth is a natural, normal physiological function for normal, healthy women and their healthy babies. It can, therefore, be inferred that healthy women, carrying healthy babies, can safely birth without peril or pain.'

Dr Jonathan Dye, *Easier Childbirth*, 1891

Foreword

This excellent hypnobirthing book will reach softly into the hearts and minds of parents approaching birth and fill them with inspirational visions of possibilities and aspirations for beautiful, peaceful, calm births for their babies and for themselves. Katharine's personal qualities – unfailing positivity, humour, the deepest respect for birth and for women, their partners and their babies, and a deep faith in the natural birth process – shine out of the pages of this splendid book.

As a midwife, I provide care to women throughout pregnancy, birth and beyond. Part of the midwife's role is to provide sound evidence-based information for couples about the various available options around birth and the many interventions in the physiological process which have become so routine that they are rarely questioned and, indeed, are widely believed to be true, despite, in some cases, an unsatisfactory or absent evidence base. The midwife then helps the couple to explore the risks and benefits of each intervention and the risks and benefits of declining these interventions, so that they can make an informed plan of their preferences.

Birth, of course, has its own agenda and does not always play out the way we might wish. Hypnobirthing is so important here too, as a calm mother can help her baby even during a complex or challenging birth. As a midwife, I also have a responsibility to inform the woman and her partner about their legal and moral rights in relation to accepting or declining aspects of health care offered to them. Couples empowered by attending Katharine's hypnobirthing courses, and by reading this book, will be in a much stronger position to face this daunting task of making informed plans for pregnancy, birth and new parenting that are right for their family.

In this inspiring book, Katharine's philosophy challenges the widespread and insidious tocophobia (pathological fear of birth) which makes pregnancy and birth so challenging today. It will be an excellent additional resource in the long journey our society needs to take back towards embracing normal birth sensations. Hypnobirthing can, and frequently does, provide a way for a mother and her baby to have a calm, drug-free, gentle and more comfortable birth. Using hypnobirthing techniques, mothers are more in tune with their powerful inner strength and can experience the transformational nature of birth, emerging full of wonder at their new-found exhilaration and sense of their own power. Their babies are born smoothly and simply, requiring fewer of the interventions and medications that can make birth so hazardous for some. Their partners are in tune with the vital work of birth, ready to nurture and protect the mother as she births her child and to receive the baby with joy and love, drawing the new family into embracing and protective arms.

Peace on Earth begins with Birth.

Liz Nightingale
Midwife and hypnobirthing teacher
www.purplewalnutmidwife.co.uk

Introduction

This is the story of how many people arrive at a hypnobirthing class. Before a woman becomes pregnant, she may have at the back of her mind, if she has thought about it at all, that she could always have a Caesarean section as a soft option. Then she becomes pregnant, does some research and realises that a Caesarean is certainly not a soft option; it is major abdominal surgery. Her hormones start to do somersaults, and she begins to realise that a natural birth is better for her and for her baby. Then the mother starts to hear some of the horror stories about birth which people seem to delight in telling pregnant women, and she begins to think that there's only one option and it's going to be painful.

At this point she hears the magic word 'hypnobirthing'. She searches the Internet to find out more, and decides it's a good idea and that she would like to do it. Pregnant women seem to spend their whole life on the Internet – I sometimes wonder how anyone ever managed to have a baby before it existed. She tells her partner that she's thinking of doing hypnobirthing, at which point he raises his eyes to heaven and wonders, 'What is she on to now? She'll only burst into tears again if I object, and we've had so many other expenses, so why do we have to pay for this as well?' And then, even worse, he discovers he is supposed to come to the classes too.

That's the scenario when a great many couples enter the room for the hypnobirthing class.

They come sceptical, and why shouldn't they, because the name implies something that is rather odd and hippyish. With a bit of luck you go into a strange, spaced-out state where hopefully something happens and you don't notice the pain. Nothing could be further from the truth, and hypnobirthing

is based on sound and irrefutable logic. People arrive at the class sceptical, and leave enthusiastic and positive.

Probably the most sceptical person I ever taught was my daughter-in-law. She only came to the class because I was her mother-in-law and she couldn't get out of it. On the day her baby was born, she woke up at 6.30am with twinges in her back, but went back to sleep until about 11am. At 1pm they rang the hospital as her contractions were very erratic but coming closer together. The hospital told her to wait until the contractions were regular, five minutes apart and one minute long, and to go and have a nice warm bath and relax, which is hospital speak (in the nicest possible way) to say that she was ringing far too early, as most first-time mothers do, and to go away. She got in the bath at about 2pm and, although the contractions were never a steady five minutes apart, by about 4.15pm she felt the need to push. The two hours or so in between had felt a lot shorter. By 4.30pm she and my son were in a taxi and on their way to hospital. Goodness knows what the driver must have thought seeing a heavily pregnant woman get into his taxi and sit on a towel – as her waters had not yet broken.

They couldn't quite get to the hospital because of roadworks, so they walked through the roadworks and every time my daughter-in-law had a contraction, my son put down her bag and she leant on him and did her breathing exercises, then he picked up her bag again and they went on their way. She remarked that even in the middle of a contraction it was still funny to be standing in the middle of a street just a block from the hospital, trying not to push and give birth then and there. When they reached the hospital she was already fully dilated, there was no time to fill the birthing pool, and the baby was born half an hour later. She says, 'It was an extremely calm experience. My husband was cracking jokes and I was laughing just minutes before the baby was born. There was

no pain during and no pain afterwards. The baby didn't cry when he was born, and not very much afterwards either.'

Just to be sure, I asked her later if there was any pain and she said, 'No. No pain.'

My daughter, on the other hand, planned to have her baby at home, but at 43 weeks the baby still hadn't arrived so she finally agreed to an induction. This is no light decision as an induction can make a significant difference to labour. But my daughter went through the whole induced labour using hypnobirthing techniques and with no drugs, which is a massive accolade to her, and to hypnobirthing. At the end, the baby was in distress (as can often happen with an induced labour) so she had a Caesarean section. But hypnobirthing made a difference even in these circumstances. She had no drugs until the spinal block for the Caesarean, and her calm state of mind, rather than feeling stressed, meant that she would have been producing different hormones, which would have made a difference to her and to her baby. (We'll look more at hormones in Chapter 2.)

These are two very different scenarios. We would all like the first, pain-free birth. It can happen, and frequently does with hypnobirthing. The second might not be considered the perfect birth, but hypnobirthing still made a difference. Hypnobirthing cannot promise the perfect pain-free birth, but in my experience, it always makes a difference, and a very big difference too.

CHAPTER 1

Hypnobirthing Explained



'... Birth is a secret of Nature.'

Marcus Aurelius,
Meditations, 170–180 AD

Hypnobirthing Explained

Most women come to a hypnobirthing class with their partners; some come on their own. You can do it either way. Fathers often come to the class unwillingly, but by the end are the most enthusiastic advocates of the method and are so glad they came.

Hypnobirthing enables a woman to work with her body, which is naturally designed to give birth. It releases the fear and negativity that she has been programmed with from an early age (everyone knows that birth is painful, don't they?), and replaces it with calm confidence, so she can enjoy this amazing experience of pregnancy and birth.

Hypnotherapy

Some people have used hypnotherapy very effectively to help them stop smoking or cope with a fear of flying, but for many people it is a word that conjures up rather strange images of stage hypnotists making people cluck like a chicken or bark like a dog, or eat an onion thinking it's an apple. In fact, hypnotherapy is merely the use of words: words used in a more focused and positive way to help people let go of some of the negative ideas they have acquired in life. When you stop

to think for a moment, our world view as an adult is simply the sum total of all the phrases we have heard and all the experiences we have had throughout our life; most of them are positive, but a few are negative. It's the human condition.

People's response to hypnotherapy is interesting too. I remember I was once working with a lady on weight loss and at the end of the session she said, 'It can't possibly have worked, because I heard every word you said, and I spent the whole time worrying that I hadn't turned off my mobile phone and that it might ring.' Her perception was that in hypnotherapy you have to go into some curious, spaced-out state, and then words waft over you and something happens. The funny thing is that she came back the next week and said, 'It was really strange. I just didn't want to pick at food during the week.' Plainly her mind had been so busy thinking about her mobile phone that the suggestions I had given had slipped in under the radar, and had worked well.

On the other hand, someone else can be so relaxed that they are practically out for the count. They look as if they are asleep, but they are not; they are in hypnosis. But at the end of the session they will probably say, 'It can't possibly have worked because I didn't hear a word you said.' Their assumption is that, in order for anything to happen, the conscious mind has to think about it and process it. But hypnotherapy will work equally well for that person too. And you know they have heard because, at the end of the session, when you suggest they open their eyes and 'come back into the room', they do. So even though they appear to be asleep, something is still listening. It is very interesting.

The power of language

Kipling said that words are the most powerful drug known to man, which is an accurate statement of the power of words.

A word in the right or the wrong place can make or ruin a friendship for life. When I went on holiday last year I remarked to a friend that I was going skiing, and he said. 'Oh, do you still ski?' Now, 'Do you ski?' is an entirely neutral question. 'Do you *still* ski?' means that you look so old and decrepit that I didn't think you could possibly stagger onto a couple of planks and slide down a mountain. I was very polite and I didn't laugh, because if my friend had realised what he had said, he would have been mortified. But his question revealed exactly what he was thinking, and one little word made all the difference.

Similarly, every mother who has been at home looking after a baby or a child will have been asked, 'Do you work, or are you just a housewife?' Now the first question, 'Do you work?' is insulting enough, and the only answer must be, 'I work 24/7. What are your hours?' But the second phrase is devastating. The little word '*just*' turns you from a normal human being of average height and reasonable intelligence into something about 2cm high, without a brain, that someone could trip over without noticing. To maintain your self-respect in the face of such comments can take a considerable mental effort.

Words are very important, and I would like you to do a simple little exercise now. Relax comfortably, and then notice what happens in your body and in your mind when you ask yourself, 'Am I in pain?' Did the thought of pain enter your head when it hadn't been there before? Did you do a quick check to see if there was any discomfort in your body? Did you perhaps notice the slightest tightening of your forehead or your jaw?

Now settle yourself comfortably again and ask yourself, 'Am I quite comfortable?' Maybe the experience was different this time. Perhaps you felt your shoulders drop a little as the tension eased away?

So, fathers, if a midwife comes into the room when your wife or partner is having her baby and asks if she is in pain, please stop her. Tell her that words are important to you, that they have an effect, and ask her not to use that word again. It is part of your role in making sure the mother feels she is in a calm, safe space as she gives birth, and I'll explain why later on. It is a perfectly good word in normal conversation but in labour it is actively harmful. It can make the mother think about having pain when she was not even considering it before, and cause tension and set her on a path of negative responses. One of the most important things that hypnobirthing fathers do is to make sure their partner feels calm and safe, and when I say that I don't just mean with low lights and soft music but, more importantly, feeling calm mentally and emotionally.

A mother sent me this email:

My husband and I participated in your hypnobirthing course and we both found it incredibly useful and inspiring. Since then we have been practising lots.

I am now 39 and a half weeks pregnant and attended a midwife appointment this morning. She told me that my baby was in the 'wrong position', as the baby's back is against my back and that I would therefore have a 'long and painful labour'. She said that I'm still allowed to go ahead with my homebirth, but that it is now likely that I will have to be transferred to hospital for an assisted delivery.

As you can imagine this has got me into a right panic! I am now really worried about the birth (I had previously been looking forward to it) and frightened that I won't be able to cope. I've looked up exercises that I can do to help the baby move into a better position, but I would be incredibly grateful if you could suggest anything else to help with this situation.

Tell a mother that her baby is in the ‘wrong position’ and the word *wrong* – *wrong* – *wrong* is resonating in her subconscious mind – ‘There’s something wrong with my baby.’ Add to this that labour will be ‘long and painful’. Then the words ‘I’m still *allowed*’ tell her that she is not sufficiently intelligent to take advice and make her own decisions but has to do what she’s told like a small child. Next she is told that she will probably have to ‘be transferred’ – not that ‘she will transfer’, i.e. something she does, but that ‘she will be transferred’, i.e. it will be done to her. Then she is frightened by the prospect of a forceps or ventouse (vacuum extraction) delivery when she had been planning a natural birth. What more could you say in two sentences to terrify a mother about to give birth?

Anyway, we did some work and restored her calm and confidence. Ten days later I received another email with her birth report:

I just wanted to let you know that we had our baby on Wednesday morning. A little girl.

Possibly due to the baby lying back to back, I felt the discomfort exclusively in my back, which led to the midwife on the phone initially telling me that I was not in labour. So, to cut a long story short, by the time a midwife came out to me three hours later I was already 7cm dilated ... and I ended up having my baby in the birthing pool approximately seven hours after we made that first telephone call.

My waters didn’t break at all, which I think must have helped the baby turn right at the last minute, just before she came out. So I think you were right when you said that ‘baby knows best’.

Thank you again, Katharine, for all of your love and kindness and support. It was absolutely invaluable during the run-up to the birth.

My comments on this second email are that a back-to-back labour is more likely to be experienced in the back, and the mother talks about discomfort but not pain. I am surprised that the midwife on the phone didn't realise that, with a back-to-back baby, the mother was describing the signs of early labour; but because she didn't realise this, the mother was able to labour undisturbed so labour progressed well and 7cm in three hours is excellent progress for a first baby, regardless of which way it is facing. A labour of seven hours is also good for a first baby. Also, most back-to-back babies turn in labour (as we will see in Chapter 4), and it would have been consoling for the mother if the first midwife had told her this.

This story is an absolutely classic example of the harm careless words can do, and the difference words can make.

Because words are so powerful, hypnobirthing uses them in a slightly different way. The word 'contraction' is made up of hard sounds: a 'c', 't' and 'n'. It is medical jargon, with connotations of pain. So there are other words that can be used instead: wave, rush or surge. My personal preference is 'surge'. It is made up of soft sounds that have a different effect. It conjures up images of the waves of the sea. Everything in nature works in that wavelike movement: the sea, light, sound, the rhythms of the seasons of the year and the hours of the day all move in waves, and certainly the muscles of the uterus in labour do. They start to work, build up to a peak, and slacken off again. So not only does the word 'surge' have a different effect, but it is perhaps a more accurate description of what is going on.

I know that you may feel rather silly and affected when you start to use the word 'surge' instead of 'contraction', but please do it. After a couple of weeks it will feel quite normal. You will see that all these small changes put together make a very big difference.

Hypnobirthing and the mind

Doing hypnobirthing is a little like learning to play a musical instrument. I could tell you how to play the piano in ten minutes, but it wouldn't mean you could do it. If you went to lessons, you would progress. But if you practised between the lessons, you would progress much faster. For some people, buying this book and listening to a relaxation CD is sufficient, but for many people it is not, and they need to do the whole course with a teacher. But nobody can say, until you have your baby, which category you are in.

Hypnobirthing is made up of a lot of simple little things, because you can't be doing with complicated things when you're giving birth. But put together they make a very big difference. The more you practise the things I suggest, the better the outcome.

As you read through this book, you will probably see a great deal of sense in what I say much of the time. But you may also come up against things that you think are not for you. I'm not saying that I'm right and you're wrong. I'm simply suggesting that everything is important and, if you feel you want to reject something, it may be that it makes you feel uncomfortable because it conflicts with an assumption you have made. If this does happen, I would ask you to take a second look. Do some research. Think about it quietly. Look at the matter again with an open mind. Reconsider it in the light of the new information you have found. And then, if you decide to change your mind, that's fine. If you decide your original judgement was right, that's fine too. But you will be coming to that decision from a place of knowledge and not from an assumption based on nothing more than social folklore about having a baby.

When talking about how the mind works, the analogy has been used that the mind is like an iceberg. The conscious

mind, the brain, is like the part you can see above the surface of the water. It is large and powerful and should be treated with great respect, and we are hugely privileged to have this amazing tool. But underneath the water is the far larger part of the iceberg, and this part is like the unconscious mind. It is difficult to answer questions about the unconscious mind because those questions come from the conscious mind – the thinking part of the mind, the part above the surface. The conscious mind is different from the unconscious mind, and can never really comprehend it. The unconscious mind is far larger, far more powerful, and should be treated with even greater respect.

Einstein is reported to have said: ‘The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.’ We are so busy thinking and working things out in our society, that we sometimes forget we have this more intuitive part of the mind. We see it in animals: anyone who has a pet dog will know that it will probably be sitting on the doormat a few minutes before its owner comes home. The animal somehow knows, and we wonder at it.

But we have these instincts too. We have all had the experience of reaching out a hand to pick up the phone to call someone, maybe someone on the other side of the world whom we haven’t spoken to for a couple of years, and just as we reach out, the phone rings and it’s that person calling us. It feels so strange when this happens, because we don’t understand it, but we’ve all had that experience and it’s an example of the intuitive mind.

Negative thoughts

In the normal course of life, the words we hear go into our conscious mind, are then processed by the unconscious mind,

and have an effect right down to a cellular level of our bodies. So while you are pregnant it is very important that the input into your mind is positive. When pregnant women have been under stress – and I mean extreme stress, not just the normal ups and downs of daily life – their babies have not developed very well. We will look at this in more depth a little later on but, between now and when your baby is born, avoid negative input, either thoughts, words or images. For instance, for the rest of your pregnancy, you are in charge of your television's remote control. There is plenty to watch that is positive, funny, educational and light hearted, and you can always look at a DVD if there is nothing suitable on television. Your husband or partner can put off watching horror movies until after your baby is born.

As soon as you became pregnant, you probably found yourself beset by people telling you horror stories about birth. This is actively harmful to you and to your baby, and no-one has the right to harm you in this way. The trouble is that we have been brought up to be polite and listen to what people say before we reply, but in this case please stop them. One mother I taught used to say, 'I'm sorry, I can't be part of this conversation until after my baby is born, so could we have it then?'

Focus on where you want to be. You get what you focus on. If you drive down the road and try to avoid the potholes, what happens? You drive straight into them. If you want to avoid the potholes, you need to focus on the flat parts of the road. It's exactly the same with everything else in life. I'm not suggesting you should be totally unrealistic. Inform yourself well before you decide anything, then, having made the decision, put the negatives out of your mind and focus on where you want to be. That way you are far more likely to get there.

The mind doesn't take in the negative form. What is the image that pops into your head if I say to you, 'Don't think

of a pink elephant?’ You can’t get the thing out of your mind. When we start to notice, it is amazing how often we talk and think in terms of the negative. ‘I’m not very good at this.’ ‘Don’t do that.’ If we want our other half to bring something home from the shops, how often do we say, ‘Don’t forget the milk?’ ‘Don’t . . . forget the milk.’ It’s just like the pink elephant. Then they come home without the milk and we say, ‘I asked you to buy some milk,’ but you didn’t, you actually told them to forget the milk, and they did exactly what you asked. If you really want them to bring home some milk, you will be far more likely to get it if you say, ‘Remember the milk.’ Start to notice how often you use the negative, and re-programme yourself to use the positive. It makes a difference, and your life will improve immeasurably.

As I have said, all thoughts are taken in by the brain, processed by the unconscious, and affect us right down to a cellular level. But the thoughts you take in last thing at night have eight hours to go on being processed. So it is particularly important that you go to sleep with a calm mind. How many people watch the news and then go to bed? The news is nothing but death and violence and negativity, and if you fill your mind with such negativity just before you go to bed, your sleep will be disturbed, and you will wake feeling less refreshed in the morning. That is why on my hypnobirthing course you are given a CD to listen to last thing at night with positive statements and visualisations about birth. I’ll explain this later on too.

How other mammals give birth

When it comes to birth, we could learn a great deal from our fellow mammals. The brain has little to do with the actual process of giving birth. We can’t decide when our

babies will be born, and we can't decide how our labour will be, though we can do a lot in preparation to affect it. If you have a cat, and you lovingly prepare a nice cosy box with a blanket in it in a warm corner of the kitchen for her to have her kittens, what happens? One day you notice that you haven't seen your cat for a while, so you mount a search and find her under the bed, or outside in the shed, with eight little kittens. She went to a small, safe place on her own where *she* felt comfortable. Not where you thought she ought to be.

If a farmer has his ewes lambing in a barn, he knows that the one who is about to give birth is the one that retires to the furthest corner and becomes very still. It's the nearest she can get in that environment to going to her small, safe place. If he goes into the house to make a cup of tea, there is a birth explosion in his absence, because the ewes feel safer not being observed.

Now please don't think I'm advocating giving birth without medical support; I am certainly not. But I am saying that if we respect our natural instincts, the birth is more likely to go smoothly and naturally. The more experienced your midwife, the less she will do or say.

In the wild, an animal will take herself away on her own to a place where she feels safe to give birth. If she's not sure, the whole process will stop, or even reverse, until she is sure it is a safe place to have her baby.

We know that animals follow their instincts, but we sometimes forget how powerful our instincts are too. We are so busy using our brains that we forget that, in certain circumstances, they have their limitations. We know that we feel safe in some places and not in others. You can go into a house and it feels entirely like home; you go into another house and you know you could never live there because it just doesn't feel right. Your body relaxes when you are at home

in your own safe space, somewhere that you feel comfortable and happy.

If you speak to a midwife who has helped mothers give birth at home, she will say it is amazing the number of times she has been with a woman who has given birth in the loo or in the bathroom. It is simply because the mother has gone to her small, safe place where she is generally alone and can shut out the world, so it is a natural place for her to want to be when she is having her baby. It may be a room upstairs, and so other people are outside and down in the road, and the hurly-burly of the world is shut out. The reason that labour so often slows down when a mother goes to hospital is simply that it is a strange place and she is being observed by strangers.

I often wonder how many mothers who arrive at hospital only to be told that they are only 1cm dilated, they are much too early and should go back home, were actually 4 or 5cm dilated when they left home, and it is just the unnatural experience of travelling across town and going to a strange place that has cause the body to tense up so the whole process has reverted. I have a very good midwife friend who tells me of an occasion when she was caring for a mother in hospital who was doing well and was 6cm dilated when she was examined. Shortly after the examination, the senior midwife bustled into the room to check what was going on, examined the mother again, and found she was 3cm dilated. It was the arrival of a stranger; a slight rush (which is stress) that caused the process to reverse. Nobody had been unpleasant, nobody had been unkind, but the body had just said, 'I'm not quite sure about this,' and the whole process had reverted.