

Does Childbirth Really Need to be Painful?

Almost any woman who has gone through childbirth will tell you all about the horror stories of just how painful it can be. Generation after generation, the torch of painful childbirth has been handed down. We see it on television, there are jokes about it, and there are a plethora of drugs you can take for it. It would seem quite obvious to most mothers that it is just a fact of life that a mother “must” endure this pain in order to give birth naturally.

“Naturally?” Naturally, pain is a signal that there is something “wrong” in the body. So, what’s “wrong” with childbirth? Well, for one let’s consider the instrument that has been holding the baby in place, the Uterus. The far majority of women who think about childbirth worry about the large baby coming out of a small place, the opening of the Uterus, called the Cervix. The other complaint is that the muscles of the uterus make it painful for the baby to move through the birth canal because of “muscles working in opposition with one another.” Is it possible that perhaps the one who came up with the design for our bodies messed up somehow? That we as women are being punished because of the curse of Eve?

Or could it be that the body was designed perfectly and we as women get in our own way of allowing it to naturally do what it needs to do. Let’s re-examine the uterus for just a moment, more specifically the two sets of muscle fibers; inner and outer. The outer muscles are long and vertical. The inner muscles are wide and horizontal. They are beautifully designed to hold the baby in your stomach for nine months. But more amazingly, they are also designed to work together to expel the baby when it is ready to come out. The top fibers are designed to pull the inner horizontal fibers up and back, widening (or dilating) the opening of the cervix. This activity is what creates the contractions during labor.

Having a good grasp on how the uterus really works in harmony with your body and that it is a perfectly designed birthing instrument is important. It is also the premise for understanding how to create a beautiful, peaceful birthing experience, the way nature intended it to be.

The most important concept to understand, however is the Fear Tension Pain Syndrome. First of all, where did the fear come from? Fear originates back to a time in the 1700’s when women were left to give birth alone and to face any possible complications alone. If there were complications, the baby was to be taken from the uterus of the mother without regard to any pain or death that might be caused. The fear was not about pain of childbirth. The fear was about being left to die if there were complications. Over time, there did become more and more respect toward women in a birth situation, but even the freedom to do it without drugs or forceps or being tied down is only as recent as the past 50 years or so.

Over time, the fear evolved into fear of painful childbirth. However, it's a catch 22. Fear is what creates painful childbirth. Fear releases hormones in the body called, Catacholamines. Catacholamines is what causes tension in the muscles. Additionally, it sends strength to the muscles that would need them in a fight or flight situation. You certainly don't need any strength in the uterus in fight or flight. Therefore, the energy required by the uterus is also drawn away, all at a time when you need the most strength in this area. This process creates pain and prolongs labor. So, the fear creates the tension and the tension creates the pain.

Fortunately, your mind is in control of what your body experiences. This is scientifically proven. Think about the way your tongue salivates when thinking of something tart. Or the way you get hungrier when you see a commercial. Or our bodies jerk to awaken us from a dream. Or when we feel no pain when we cut ourselves, until we see the blood.

It goes even further than merely thinking the pain away, though. Physiologically, in the same way that fear releases the Catacholamines, during relaxation, your body creates a kinder, gentler hormone, called endorphins. The word Endorphin is abbreviated from 'endogenous morphine' which means a morphine produced naturally in the body. They are secreted to remove stress or pain. In other words, they block the signal of pain to the nervous system. The effect reduces the pain and causes a euphoric effect to occur.

The relaxation response turns off the fight or flight response, preventing the Catacholamines from being released, and therefore creating a more pleasant childbirth experience.

Additionally, relaxing all the muscles in your body and properly breathing, gives your body and the baby room to work in perfect harmony with each other in order to do what they need to do.

The technique of learning to turn this relaxation response on in your body is taught through HypnoBirthing Education classes. The HypnoBirthing childbirth method is a philosophy and a technique that prepares you to use your own natural birthing instincts. In addition to the relaxation methods taught in the four 2 ½ hour classes, you will see videos of other birthings that have used this technique, you will be educated about your birthing body, you will release your fears about birthing and parenting, you will learn prenatal bonding, you will learn "slow" and "sleep" breathing techniques, visualization techniques, and other techniques to facilitate a safer, faster, and easier birth without any medication.

Once upon a time, childbirth was a joyous celebration, where a woman was honored and was considered a natural healer, based upon the miracle she could create with her body. We may have come a long way with science, medicine, and technology. We have even come a long way where women's rights are concerned. However, I say until the day that agony during childbirth becomes the exception to the rule, we have not come far enough.

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