

A to Z



of  
Hypnobirthing



**THE  
ROTUNDA  
HOSPITAL**  
DUBLIN



**Rotunda Private**  
Part of The Rotunda Hospital Dublin

## A-Z of the Birth Toolbag

**A** is for '**Acupuncture**' and '**Acupressure**' too,  
**B** stands for '**Breathing**' which alone can get you through.  
**B** is also for '**Ball**', be it to sit upon or squeeze  
Or perhaps to lean on while you're down on hands and knees

**C** represents the '**Cycle**' to achieve,  
Calm, Controlled and Confident...let yourself believe.

**D** is for '**Dancing**' your babe into position  
trying for direct OA should be your bopping mission

**E** is for the '**Epidural**', never rule one out  
there is a time and place for one, of that there is no doubt.  
**E** also stands for '**Energy**', be sure to maintain hydration  
and awareness of the kicks and rolls of your unborn creation.

**F** is for the '**Fragrance**' of '**aromatherapy**'  
'**Gas and air**' is represented by the lovely letter **G**.  
**H** stands for '**Homeopathy**' and of course '**Hypnobirth**'  
which many women have found to be of tremendous worth.

**H** is also for '**Heat pack**' and '**Hot water bottle**'  
**I** is for your '**Intuition**' if things start to go full throttle.  
**J** is for the ability to '**Juggle**' each and every tool  
Unfortunately, there'll never be, a 'one fits all' rule

**K** is for your '**Knowledge**' of the entire birth process,  
ensuring that you're well informed will lessen any stress  
**L** is for the '**Lights**' to be kept turned down nice and low  
**M** is for '**Massage**' and '**Music**' fast or slow.

**M** also stands for '**Midwife**', expert in all that's normal  
Call them by their first name- they don't like to be too formal.  
**N** is for '**Nipple twiddling**' to keep oxytocin flowing  
although there are other ways to keep your labour going.

**O** is for '**Obstetrician**' who without any doubt, specialise in abnormalities and may assist your baby out.

**O** is also for '**Osteopath**' who like '**Physios**' have a place in opening up the pelvis, to create more room and space

**P** is for '**Paracetamol**' and '**Pethidine**' should you require

**Q** is for the '**Quietness**' that many labouring women desire

**R** is for '**Resting**' and of course '**Relaxation**'

It's also for '**Remifentanyl**', though used only on rare occasion.

**S** is for '**Support**'- be it partner, doula or friend the benefits of such support not merely a modern trend.

**T** is for '**T.E.N.S.**' machine, a super little device

You can never put it on too soon would be great advice.

**U** is for '**You**', the most important letter here, To trust in your ability, to conquer any fear.

**V** is for '**Vocalising**' and '**Visualising**' your mission, it is also for '**Variety**' in 'posture' and 'position'.

**W** is for '**Water**' be it pool or bath or shower never underestimate it's raw amazing power.

**X** is a letter in '**Reflexology**', those pressure points can help reduce so much anxiety

**Y** is for '**Yoga**' and perhaps '**Pilates**' too

Whichever you find useful, whatever helps you through.

Keep all your options open, you know not how things will go

And unless you try out all your tools you'll really never know.

If one tool doesn't help you, don't discount the rest, the letter **Z** represents all your '**Zeal**' and '**Zest**'!



# Contents A - Z

<u>A</u> cupuncture	06	<u>N</u> ipple twiddling	30
<u>B</u> reathing	08	<u>O</u> bstetrician	31
<u>C</u> ycle	12	<u>P</u> aracetamol	32
<u>D</u> ancing	15	<u>Q</u> uietness	33
<u>E</u> pidural	16	<u>R</u> elaxation	34
<u>F</u> ragrance	21	<u>S</u> upport	36
<u>G</u> as and Air	22	<u>T</u> ENS machine	37
<u>H</u> omeopathy	23	<u>U</u> is for You	38
<u>I</u> ntuition	25	<u>V</u> ocalising	38
<u>J</u> uggle	26	<u>W</u> ater	40
<u>K</u> nowledge	27	Refle <u>X</u> ology	41
<u>L</u> ights	28	<u>Y</u> oga	41
<u>M</u> assage	29	<u>Z</u> eal and Zest	41

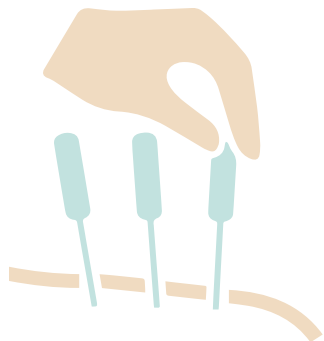
**Hypnobirthing Stories** 42

## Authors:

**Susan Hogan** - Registered Midwife, **Nadia Arthurs** - Registered Midwife  
and **Sarah McCann** - Registered Midwife

## Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a complementary therapy that originated in China thousands of years ago. It is believed that when an imbalance occurs within the body, it can actually block the flow of vital energy along the body's internal pathways. During Acupuncture a very thin needle is inserted through the skin at points along these pathways. It is believed that correcting these imbalances may result in an improvement in physical and emotional wellbeing.



Researchers have found that Acupuncture points correspond with specific nerves, when these nerves are activated it triggers the release of your body's natural chemicals. When used during pregnancy and birth, Acupuncture can stimulate the production of endorphins, these endorphins may reduce discomfort brought about by waves. Acupuncture also helps to relieve a number of common pregnancy symptoms such as heartburn, swollen legs and ankles, constipation, carpal tunnel syndrome and sciatica.

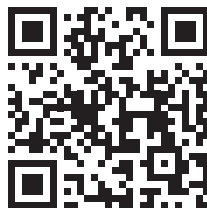
## Acupressure

Acupressure is a similar concept to Acupuncture, however instead of using needles, a firm pressure is applied to each pressure point. Studies have shown that Acupressure may help to ease lower back discomfort, ease discomfort during birthing, reduce nausea and headaches and reduce stress and anxiety. It is also believed that Acupressure can help prepare a woman's body for her birthing.

There are five major Acupressure points within our body that are believed to assist with optimal fetal positioning, birth preparation and comfort management during the birthing journey.

Debra Betts is a world renowned Acupuncturist/Acupressurist specialising in the area of pregnancy and birth. Debra's website is filled with useful information and YouTube videos. These learning aids will equip you with the skills and tools needed to use Acupressure as a method of preparing your body for birthing, and also to reduce discomfort brought about by waves during your birthing.

**Website:** <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/>



Take a note of your 'go to' pressure points.... You can use these pressure points both at home and on Delivery Suite.

Birth preparation acupressure points	Comfort measure points for birthing journey

Possible risks of acupuncture and acupressure during pregnancy:

When performed by a trained professional, Acupuncture during pregnancy is considered safe and has few risks. Most risks are associated with Acupuncture in general, such as soreness, redness or infection at the insertion sites, and injury from needles placed too deeply.

The biggest concern around Acupuncture/Acupressure during pregnancy is that it can induce birthing. For this reason it is recommended that you do not stimulate the above Acupressure points until >36weeks gestation.

## Breathing' which alone can get you through

It's at your disposal 24/7. Use it to slow your heart rate, to quiet your mind or to listen deeply to yourself. Try it. Slow, deep breath in, even slower breath out. Repeat. Deep, slow breath in, even slower breath out, Repeat..... Then check in with yourself again. Did you notice a change? It's magic, to use anytime, anywhere, anyplace. Just breathe.

### Rectangle Box Breaths

Begin by looking at the bottom left corner of any rectangle in the room. As your eyes move up the left side of the rectangle breathe in 2...3...4....5....6 as your eyes move across the top hold your breath...2....3..., then as your eyes begin to glide down the right side slowly exhale...2....3...4....5....6 and finally as your eyes move across the bottom hold...2...3... You are now back at your starting point.

Repeat the exercise at least 3 times.  
Adapt the breath lengths if needed.

Scan QR code for a  
Video of Practice  
Breathing Techniques  
for Birth and Beyond



### Golden Thread Breath

Take a deep breath in through your nose 2...3...4...5...6 and exhale out your slightly parted lips. As the breath leaves your lips visualise a fine golden thread spinning out on your out breath. Visualise the golden thread spinning out and away into the horizon, for as long as the breath will comfortably carry it. Let the focus of your attention remain really precise. Let it start at the exhale, on the lips, and then allow it to travel out into the air along your golden thread for as long as the breath, and your mind, can comfortably carry it.

Repeat five to ten rounds of golden thread breathing and then return to your normal breath.



**Exercise:**

*Note how you feel both before breathing exercises and after breathing exercises:*

Before  
breathing exercises

After  
breathing exercises

**B” is also for ‘Ball’, be it to sit upon or squeeze or perhaps to lean on while you’re down on hands and knees.....**

The ‘birthing ball’ can play an important role on your birth journey.

Around 1 in 4 women can suffer from pelvic girdle pain (PGP) for a variety of reasons, such as changes in the activity of some of the muscles supporting the pelvis, hormonal changes softening the ligaments in preparation for birth and postural changes as baby grows. Using a birthing ball in pregnancy can be useful for women suffering from PGP as it will help improve your posture and activate and strengthen the muscles that support your back and pelvis, with the aim of improving function and comfort levels.

You will need to be sure that you are using the correct size birthing ball, they generally come in three different sizes so ensure you have the correct size for your height. If you are around 5’6 in height the 65cm should be the right height for you, if you are shorter the 55cm birthing ball might be more suitable and if you are taller the 75cm ball would be ideal. Your gym ball should be properly inflated and it should be anti-burst which means the ball will slowly deflate if punctured. You can purchase a birthing ball in all good sports shops.

Here are some examples of exercises that you can do using the birthing ball:

## 1: Pelvic Tilt



- Starting position: Sitting up tall on gym ball or a chair
- Breathe in and as you breathe out draw in your abdominal muscles and tilt your pelvis back so that you are sitting on your tailbone and lowest part of your spine
- Breathe in as you sit up straight again
- Repeat 15-20 times

## 2: Roll Down



- Starting Position: Sitting tall on the ball
- Begin by dropping your head allowing your shoulders, mid-back and lower back to follow as you slide your hands down the front of your legs
- Hold for 5 seconds and slowly stack back up
- Repeat 5-10 times

### 3: Side Stretch



- Starting position: Sitting on gym ball or chair
- Lean over to one side and reach your arm up and over
- Hold for 5 seconds
- You can add a rotation in by pointing your chest down towards the ground as you reach over.
- Repeat 5 times on each side

Using a birthing ball on your birth journey can be a comfortable position between contractions; it also enables you to use gravity to assist with the birth of your baby.

### The Peanut Ball:

A peanut ball is oval shaped, and is slightly narrower in the middle

Using a peanut ball is particularly useful if you need to remain in bed following an epidural or any other medical reasons. The ball is usually placed between your legs in a high sitting position to open your pelvis.



Another recommended position is lying on your side with the ball between your legs.

You can purchase a peanut ball in all good sports shops.

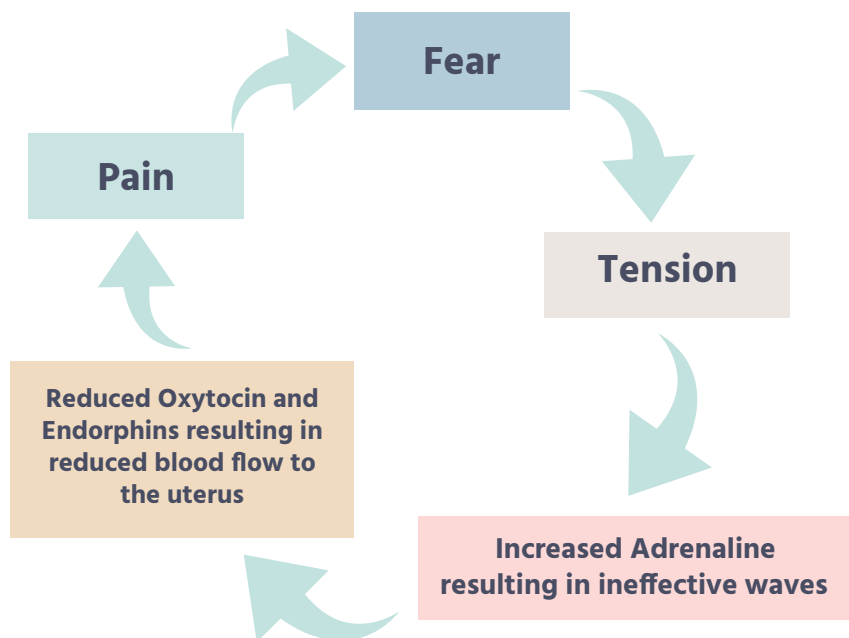
## the 'Cycle' to achieve, Calm, Controlled and Confident... let yourself believe.

### Fear, Tension, Pain Cycle

In the 1930's, a British obstetrician by the name of Dr. Grantly Dick-Read described what we know today as the "Fear-Tension-Pain" cycle. Dick-Read suggested that fear of childbirth can result in a woman's body becoming tense, and that this tension can increase her pain or discomfort. The increased pain can then result in an increased fear... and so the cycle continues.

Dick-Read suggested breaking this cycle in two ways:

- Reduce fear by educating women about what is happening during their birthing journey
- Reduce tension by encouraging relaxation, and equipping women and their birth partners with tools which will assist in keeping calm thus reducing fear + pain.



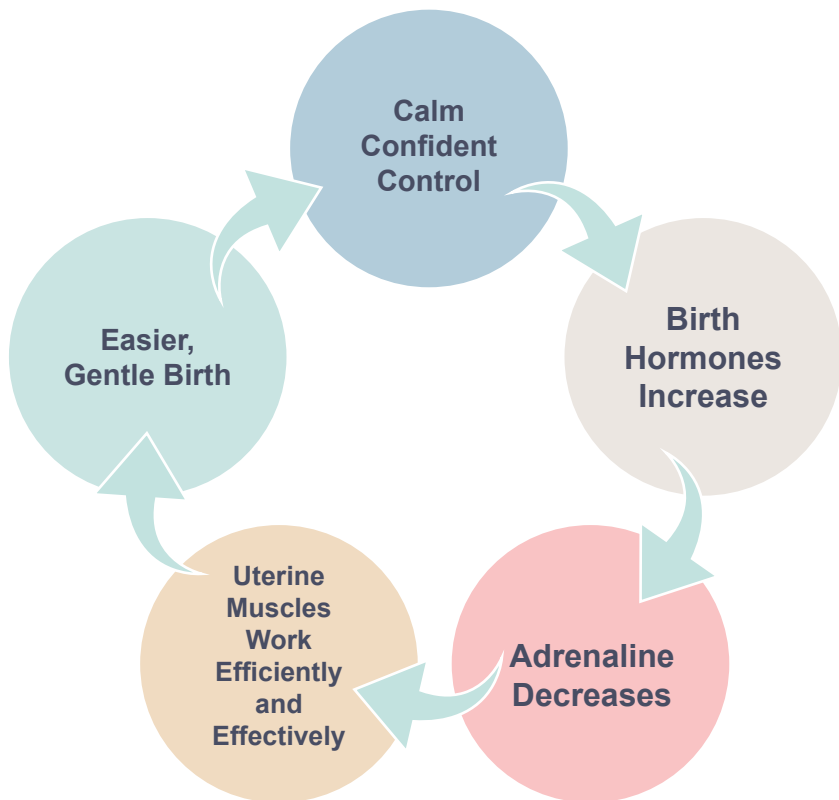
### **Calm, Confident and In-Control Cycle**

This cycle has the opposite effect as Hypnobirthing:

- Educates women about what is happening during their birthing.
- Encourages relaxation, and equips women and their birthing partners with tools which will assist in keeping calm thus reducing fear + pain.

Having a thorough understanding of how birth works allows women to feel calm, confident and in control. This will result in the production of an abundance of birth hormones and minimal fight or flight response.

This calm birthing body will enable the birthing womb to contract efficiently and effectively resulting in an easier, more gentle birth.





## Question:

Which birthing cycle would you rather be in and why?

## 'Dancing' your babe into position, trying for direct OA should be your bopping mission

Your babys position can influence their birthing journey..... and in turn impact on how your birthing progresses, as it is believed that some fetal positions move through the pelvis more smoothly than others. For this reason, optimal fetal positioning is an important tool all pregnant women should be aware of.

It is believed that birthing may be smoother when babies begin from the left occiput anterior position, also known as LOA. Left occiput position is a position whereby your baby's head is down, with their back to the left side of the front of your bump (see image)

Most babies will gravitate towards this position in preparation for birth, however there are some tools you can incorporate into day to day life that may encourage optimal fetal positioning.

This is not to say that you cannot birth a baby from another starting position-most babies will still rotate during their birth journey..... it may just result in a slightly longer process.

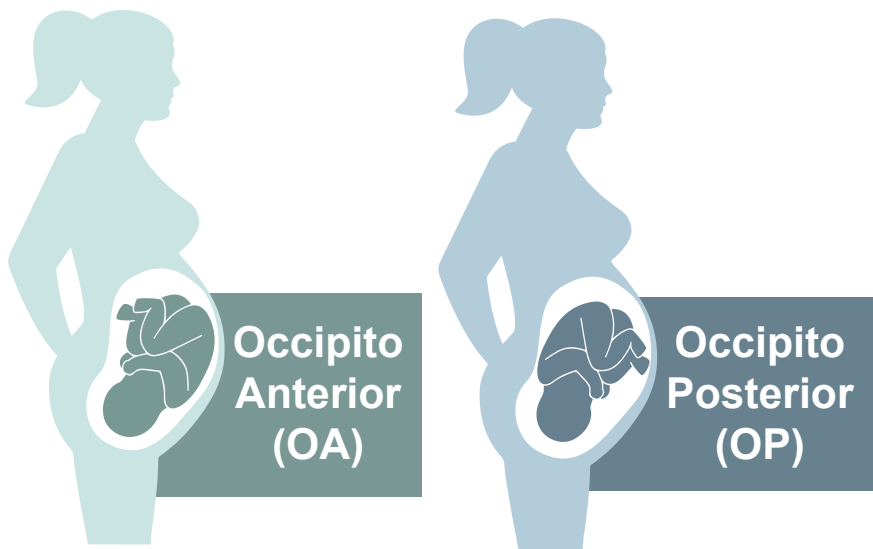
Dancing can also help-perhaps try this:  
<https://youtu.be/XNZNRJiEt5U>



### How to achieve Optimal Fetal Positioning

- Avoid slouching and sitting in deep armchairs... especially in last 6 weeks of pregnancy
- Sit with your knees lower than your hips... avoid long car journeys
- When sleeping lye on your side with your upper leg forward so the knee touches the mattress or place a pillow between knees
- Go swimming or walking
- Try not to sit with your legs crossed
- If baby is in posterior position try hands and knees position x 20mins daily
- If baby is posterior or breech try [www.spinningbabies.com](http://www.spinningbabies.com)





**E** is for...

**‘Epidural’, never rule one out, there is a time and place for one, of that there is no doubt.**

The word ‘epidural’ refers to a space in your back where ‘pain signals’ from your womb and birth canal pass to the brain. An epidural involves injecting local anaesthetic and medication into this space to block the sensation of discomfort brought on by your waves. If you decide you would like an epidural, the anaesthetist will explain how the procedure works including the advantages and disadvantages (see below). You will be required to give verbal consent before an epidural can be administered.

It takes 20 minutes to set up the epidural. An IV will be inserted into your hand/arm to give you extra fluids that will reduce the risk of low blood pressure associated with epidurals. The midwife will help you into a sitting position or you can lie on your side. This makes it easier to insert the epidural tubing. You will be asked to stay very still while the tube is being inserted.

[www.labourpains.org/downloads/english-resources/epiduralinformationcard.pdf](http://www.labourpains.org/downloads/english-resources/epiduralinformationcard.pdf)





<b>Advantages of an Epidural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually provides excellent comfort management</li> <li>• Can be topped up for C-Section if required</li> </ul>
<b>Guaranteed Side Effects of an Epidural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A urinary catheter will be required, this is placed into your bladder to keep it empty.</li> <li>• You can no longer mobilise so you must stay in bed</li> <li>• Continuous monitoring is now required.</li> <li>• Is it recommended that you reduce snacks and sip on still water only</li> </ul>
<b>Potential Side Effects of an Epidural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The epidural may delay the pushing phase of your birthing journey</li> <li>• You are more likely to have an assisted birth with forceps or vacuum (however, it does not increase the chance of needing a caesarean section)</li> <li>• Might not be as effective as you has hoped (1 in 8 women)</li> <li>• 1 in 100 people can develop severe headaches in the days following birth. This can be treated but it involves having another epidural procedure.</li> </ul>
<b>Rare Side Effects of an Epidural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary nerve damage 1:1000</li> <li>• More permanent nerve damage 1:13,000</li> <li>• Severe injury, including being paralysed 1:250,000 women</li> </ul>

## Some frequently asked Questions:

### 1. How long does it take to start working?

Epidural will be working well after 30 mins

### 2. When is the latest I can receive an epidural?

Once you can sit calmly, between waves the anesthetist will happily site an epidural

### 3. How long before I can get up and walk after babys born?

Approx 6 hours, under supervision of midwife on the ward

### 4. Will it affect my ability to perform skin to skin or breastfeed?

Once baby is healthy and well and you're feeling good skin to skin and BF will be carried out as normal

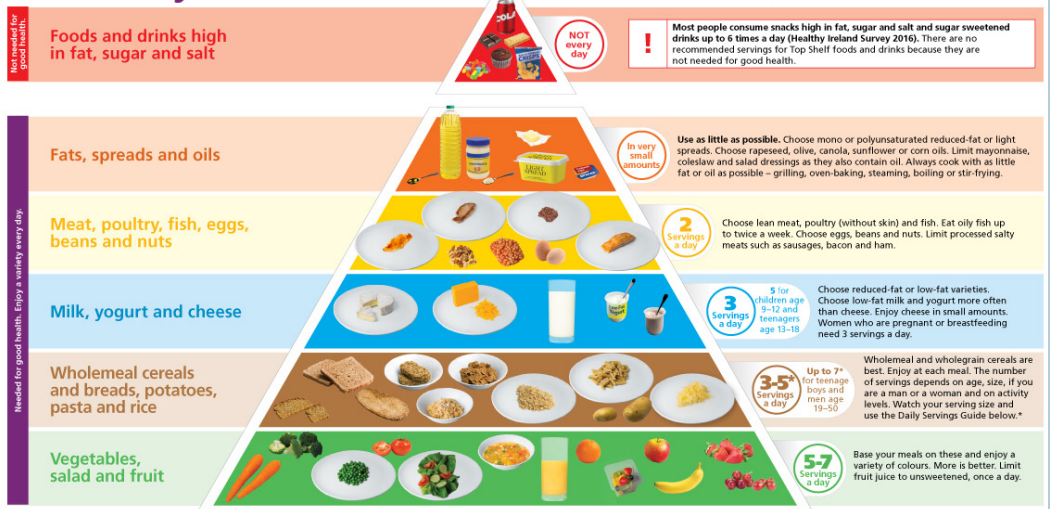
## “E” also stands for ‘Energy’, be sure to maintain hydration

Healthy eating is important for everyone, but it is particularly important during pregnancy as your baby is growing and developing. During pregnancy, you can also help to lower your baby’s risk of disease later in life and keep yourself well and healthy by eating enough of the right foods.

Your diet should include a wide variety of foods, low in fat, sugar and salt, and rich in whole grains, fruit, vegetables and calcium. The food pyramid is a guide to getting a good balance of each food group in your diet.

## The Food Pyramid

For adults, teenagers and children aged five and over



## Our Dietitians Top Tips for Healthy Eating

- Include 3 main meals and 2-3 healthy snacks each day
- Aim to have half of your plate as fruit or vegetables at each main meal
- In the second half of pregnancy, aim to include an extra serving of protein-rich foods (e.g. lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans and nuts) each day
- Choose wholegrain breads, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes with the skins on for extra fibre and nutrients
- If you are expecting twins (or more) or if you are a teenager, you should aim to have 5 servings of dairy (or calcium-rich alternatives) every day
- Only have processed meats, fast food, sugar, cakes, biscuits and sweet desserts occasionally (not daily)

## Key Nutrients for a Healthy Pregnancy:

- Folic acid (folate)
- Iron and vitamin C
- Calcium and vitamin D
- Omega-3 fatty acids and
- Iodine



Scan  
to view  
Food  
Pyramid

Tell your doctor, midwife or pharmacist about all medicines and supplements you are taking to ensure they are safe for pregnant women.

For more advice and information on food safety, common problems during pregnancy and healthy weight gain visit: [www.rotunda.ie/nutrition](http://www.rotunda.ie/nutrition)

Or watch our nutrition in pregnancy video:  
<https://youtu.be/V8iuBxHc1II>



### Healthy Eating During The Birth Journey

On your birthing journey you require a lot of energy. It is helpful to eat nutritious snacks to ensure you have energy for the later stages.

- Eat when you feel hungry- your food intake can be guided by your appetite
- Eating foods high in sugar will give a burst of energy, so it's helpful to include foods that provide a slow release of energy. Here are some ideas of energy packed snacks (see below for snack ideas)
- You may want to avoid high fat foods and fizzy drinks as often these can leave you feeling nauseous
- Keeping hydrated is also really important- this birth journey is thirsty work! Drink or sip on water /squash regularly. You may also wish to have drinks such as juice, milk or isotonic drinks

**Note:** You may be asked to avoid eating if a caesarean birth is likely  
Snack ideas:

- Yogurt (with a sprinkle of oats / nuts / seeds / berries)
- Piece of fruit
- Nuts & dried fruit
- Rice cakes with banana and peanut butter
- Oatcakes with avocado and lime
- Apple & peanut butter
- Warm milk
- Wholegrain crackers / small pitta with cheese or nut butter or hummus
- Small bag of plain popcorn
- Small handful of nuts
- Hummus and snack peppers/baby corns/cherry tomatoes/carrot sticks/mini cucumber/pita
- Cereal & milk
- Toast
- Flapjacks

## And awareness of the kicks and rolls of your unborn creation.

From around 24 weeks of pregnancy right up to the moments before birth, your baby will be moving around inside you. At 24 weeks these movements feel like flutters, and as baby grows... the movements you feel will change however the baby's movement pattern will always remain the same. If you are unsure about your baby's movements, there are a few things you can do to encourage baby to move:

- Gently rub your tummy and talk to your baby
- Drink some cold water or eat something sweet
- Have a warm bath or shower

These things will often wake your baby up and normal movements will start again. You will be very aware of your own baby's pattern of movement. If you have any concerns about the amount or type of movements you are experiencing, please contact your midwife, doctor or the assessment and emergency unit. Your awareness of your own baby's movements is very important:

Describe how baby's movements feel:

@24 weeks: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

@30 weeks: \_\_\_\_\_

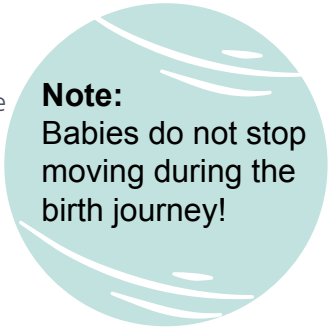
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@36 weeks: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

@40 weeks: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**Note:**  
Babies do not stop moving during the birth journey!

## the fragrance of 'aromatherapy'

Aromatherapy is a holistic healing treatment that uses natural plant extracts to promote health and well-being. Sometimes it's called essential oil therapy. Aromatherapy uses aromatic essential oils medicinally to improve the health of the body, mind, and spirit. It enhances both physical and emotional health.

How can we use essential oils:

- Baths (not before 13 weeks)
- Massages (not before 13 weeks)
- Creams (not before 13 weeks)
- Compresses (not before 13 weeks)
- Diffusers (can be used at any gestation)
- Spritz bottles to fragrance room (can be used at any gestation)

## Essential oils that are safe to use in pregnancy and the benefits of each:



**'Gas and air' is represented by the lovely letter "G".**

This is a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide. It acts quickly and wears off quickly once you stop using it. While it won't take the sensation away completely, it makes the waves easier to cope with. It doesn't cause any harm to the baby and it can be used at any time during the established phase of birthing. It can also be used with the TENS machine or in the bath.

**Advantages of Entonox**

- Immediate acting, quick to wear off
- Extremely effective if used correctly
- Will reduce discomfort experienced during waves
- Can stay mobile
- Helps to control breathing
- Can layer with other comfort measures eg. TENS or Bath
- Does pass through placenta however has no adverse effects to baby

**Disadvantages of Entonox**

- Can sometimes be associated with nausea

**‘Homeopathy’ and of course ‘Hypnobirth which many women have found to be of tremendous worth.....**

## Homeopathy

Homeopathy is a natural form of medicine used to treat both acute and chronic conditions. Homeopathic medicines - known as remedies - are made from substances designed to help stimulate the body’s healing ability. Homeopaths work in a similar way to conventional doctors. However, as well as your current symptoms, a homeopath will discuss your lifestyle, medical history and emotional wellbeing before prescribing the appropriate homeopathic medicine.

Homeopathic medicines are made from small amounts of natural substances such as plants and minerals, usually taken as a tablet but are also available as liquids, powder or creams.

Homeopathy has been practiced worldwide for over 250 years. It is gentle and rarely causes side effects. This means it is suitable for adults, children and pregnant or breastfeeding women

Homeopathic medicines can be bought over the counter at Homeopathic Pharmacies. While many people find homeopathy useful for minor ailments or family first aid, we would always recommend consulting a qualified and registered homeopath for best results.

Pro tip: Helios sell a homeopathy for childbirth kit:  
[www.ish.ie/shop/childbirth-kit/](http://www.ish.ie/shop/childbirth-kit/)



## Hypnobirth

Hypnobirthing aims to rewire your subconscious and unconscious mind so that thoughts and thinking around birth are joyous and positive, encouraging the correct birth hormones to be produced in ample amounts resulting in a more comfortable, smoother, slightly quicker birth.

Hypnobirthing will also give you an in depth understanding of the birthing body and how it works as ‘knowledge is power’ on this journey. Women and birthing partners who are fully in tune with what is happening and who know what to expect will naturally remain a lot calmer when supporting during / or giving birth.



Hypnobirthing explains the birthing hormones and the vital role they play in the birthing journey. These hormones are prostaglandin, oxytocin and endorphins (naturally you may never have heard these terms before so we will explain these in your Hypnobirthing class). Hypnobirthing equips you and your partner with tools to use in preparation for and during your birthing journey. These tools will allow you to relax and breathe which will help ease discomfort associated with your waves.

Hypnobirthing explains how our bodies will produce perfect quantities of birthing hormones when we are relaxed and calm. Hypnobirthing explains how stress and fear can interfere with their production. So naturally, hypnobirthing involves techniques which empower both you and your birthing partner to stay calm, in control and confident in the run up to, during and after your baby's birth.

Women who feel 'listened to' and 'in control' during their birthing often report their birth experience as a positive one, regardless of birth mode.

**“H” is also for ‘Heat pack’ and ‘Hot water bottle’.....**

We all know how soothing a heat pack, hot water bottle, bath or shower can be when we have tired or achey muscles, or we are just plain weary. All of these can work wonders when we are birthing too. Not only do they soothe our bodies, but they also help us to relax so we can produce more oxytocin – the wonderful hormone of love that causes our uterine muscle to contract. So, heat packs and hot water bottles not only soothe us but they help the progression of our birthing.

**THINK!!!** What else do you do when you are feeling tired and achey?

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### **your 'Intuition' if things start to go full throttle.**

Your body knows how to birth your baby. For a good birth experience it is important that you prepare both your body and your mind. Attend your Antenatal classes, do your birth preparation, pack your toolbox. An essential element of your preparation is acknowledging that you instinctively know how to birth your baby. It is important that you trust your intuition and let it guide you as you navigate your journey. You are the driving force/integral part of the team navigating your journey. You and your partner know YOU best. It is important that you use this knowledge and your intuition to guide your decision making. The other members of the team are the hospital staff. In order to combine their expertise with your expertise the use of BRAIN is encouraged. This acronym is a decision making tool can be useful on your birth journey and indeed for life afterwards!

**Benefits** – What are the benefits of what is being suggested?

**Risks** – If I accept this intervention are there any risks?

**Alternatives** – In order to get these benefits is there anything else I can do that does not involve the risks?

**Intuition/Implications** – What is my instinct or intuition? Are there any implications – if I accept this intervention am I saying yes to other interventions further along in my birthing journey?

**Nothing** – What if I do nothing? Can I revisit this decision in an hour or two?

Sometimes it is the birthing partner who is the one to apply BRAIN because the birthing woman is in the zone under the influence of her birthing hormones. When the birthing woman is in the zone it is still important that we get consent from her rather than her partner for any decisions that are being made on her birthing journey.

**THINK!!!** Can you think of another situation where you used your intuition to help guide you to make a decision that was right for you?

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**the ability to 'Juggle' each and every tool, unfortunately there'll never be, a 'one fits all' rule...**

The beauty of the toolbox you have available for your birthing journey is that you can pick and choose what tool suits you best in the current moment. It is best to be prepared and have everything ready in your toolbox so you can use whichever tool you feel will serve you best at the time. There is a bit of juggling involved because we cannot know in advance which tool will be the most effective and when. Just because you used a tool earlier does not mean it cannot be used again. So..... best to be prepared and then to be open to trying things out. Be mindful and honest – if it's working, great, if not, set that tool aside and try the next tool that comes around in the juggle. It is best to be prepared for all eventualities.

Stress ball	Birth Ball	Isotonic Drink	Scripts	Rescue Remedy
Cool Sponge	Meditation	Mindfulness	Positions	T.E.N.S Machine
Dim Lights	Quiet	Eye Mask	Fairy Lights	Hot Water Bottle
Bath	Shower	Massage	B.R.A.I.N.	Nipple Twiddling
Aromatherapy	Music	Swaying	Acupressure	Visual Anchor
Ear Buds or a Docking Station	Sit on the Toilet	Breath Awareness	Hand on Shoulder	Thumb and Forefinger Anchor
Homeopathy	Vocalising	Water sprays	Hand held fan	Peanut Ball



**your 'Knowledge' of the entire birth process, ensuring that you're well informed will lessen any stress**

If only we had a crystal ball that would let us know how our birth was going to unfold, life would be a lot less stressful. The unknown can make birth more intriguing but also in a time where we like to have our lives well organised and planned, the unknown can be disconcerting. It is therefore important for you to acquaint yourself with all aspects of the birthing process. It is important to attend good quality antenatal, hypnobirthing, yoga/pilates and physical skills birth classes. There are lots of great books and good quality websites you can access for your birthing, parenting and breastfeeding journeys, so you can be confident in your knowledge and be prepared. The birthing journey, like life, can sometimes take unexpected turns. Being fully informed of potential detours can mean a far less stressful journey overall.

**THINK!!!! Can you think of another time that you wished you had a crystal ball? What did you do at that time to handle the uncertainty?**

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### the 'Lights' to be kept turned down nice and low....

As mentioned above, oxytocin is the hormone that helps your uterus to contract when you are on your birthing journey. Another important hormone is melatonin. This works with oxytocin and helps it to work more efficiently. We produce melatonin in the evenings and when the lights are low so it's best to keep the lights dimmed if we want to keep our birthing journey progressing.



Another reason to keep the lights dimmed is because we are more relaxed when the lights are dim and we tend to speak more quietly. You, the birthing mother, are less likely to be disturbed when you are in the zone with your birthing hormones. So, pull the blinds and dim the lights, and if you are in the mood, plug in your fairy lights to make the room lovely and cosy. Once you are relaxed you will send a message to your body that it is safe to birth and then the oxytocin will flow, which gives the birthing journey more momentum to keep going.

**Question?** Where else do we instinctively speak quieter?

Why do we do that?

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## Massage' and 'Music' - fast or slow...

While we are in a lovely, cosy mood why not bring in some massage? Massage can help you to relax and progress your birthing journey. It is important that you give feedback to your birth partner so that the massage is given at the right intensity and in the right area. It is difficult to know in advance which massage, and where, will work best. If you and your partner have practiced in pregnancy, you are more likely to be in tune and the massage is going to be more effective. It also has the by-product of relaxing both the giver as well as the receiver.



It is important to point out that a soft, slow, fingertip light touch is really great at helping the woman to produce oxytocin. Apparently, when we use this touch on the skin at the rate of 1 cm per second we send a message to the pituitary gland to produce more oxytocin. It's also great to be aware that this touch can be on the skin of the forearm, the thigh etc. it doesn't have to be the formal back massage that we are more used to.

As for music, the choice of music the birthing woman wants to play during her journey is often surprising. Sometimes the music is from her native country, sometimes it's mellow and other times it is hard rock. The choice of music is obviously very personal, and it is a tool which you and your birthing partner can pre-prepare to have in the birthing room. We have Bluetooth speakers in the birthing rooms so all you have to do in the hospital is turn on your Bluetooth and hit 'Play'. You know the type of music that will assist you to stay relaxed and in your birthing zone and what will help you to produce copious amounts of your birthing hormones.



**THINK!!!!** What type of music are you planning on having prepared for your birthing journey?

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**M also stands for 'Midwife', expert in all that's normal  
Call them by their first name- they don't like to be too formal!**

Midwife means 'with woman' – it is the role of the midwife to support and assist you in your choices as you move along in your birthing journey. She is the clinical expert so long as the birthing journey takes a normal course. Definitely not always a glamorous job but the rewards are amazing. What an honour and a privilege to be at the birth of your child and to be part of your journey into parenting.



**N** is for...

**'Nipple twiddling' to keep oxytocin flowing although  
there are other ways to keep your labour going.**

So, you may have noticed that oxytocin has been mentioned once or twice! This is a really important hormone on your birthing and breastfeeding journeys. Your uterus has 'oxytocin receptors' which are turned to the 'ON' position as your body prepares for birth. When these are turned on and your birth is progressing, the oxytocin you produce will slot into these receptors and cause your uterine muscles to do their job and bring the birth of your baby closer. Oxytocin also has an important job in your breastfeeding journey. Its role in breastfeeding is to assist in the transport of the milk to the nipple. We can use this knowledge to help us progress our birthing because.....if we convince our body, through 'nipple twiddling' that we are breastfeeding, it will produce more oxytocin and this will help our birthing to progress.

There are other ways to encourage our body to keep the oxytocin flowing, these would be making love, eating dates, walking, sitting on the birth ball, walking up the stairs sideways, acupressure, massage, cuddling, homeopathy and hypnobirthing to name just a few!



**‘Obstetrician’ who without any doubt, specialise in abnormalities and may assist your baby out...**

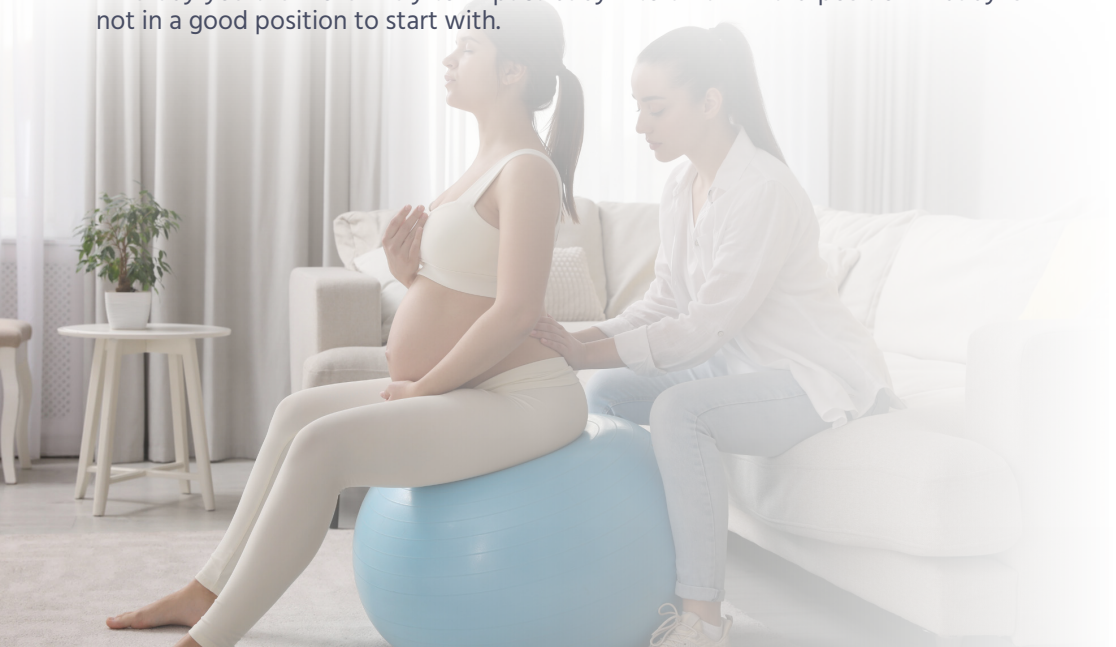
Your midwife is the expert in normal pregnancy and birth and an Obstetrician is the expert in abnormal pregnancy and birth. When a birthing journey ventures out of the normal the obstetrician is a very welcome member of the team. Their expertise will help determine the route a birthing journey may need to take if there has been an unplanned turn. The more common reasons for a referral to obstetric care would be raised blood pressure, a woman requiring an induction to start their birth journey or require an assisted vaginal birth.

**“O” is also for ‘Osteopath’ who like ‘Physios’ have a place, in opening up the pelvis to create more room and space...**

Body workers like Physiotherapists, Osteopaths and Chiropractors can be helpful to attend both antenatally and postnatally. They can help to make more room in your pelvis when you are pregnant and ease the stretchy aches and pains. Postnatally they can help to get your body back to itself after the birth of your baby. Some are trained as cranio-sacral therapists and these can be helpful for your baby after birth, particularly after an assisted vaginal birth, as sometimes a baby’s head can be a bit tender. Osteopaths offer gentle manipulation of the plates of the skull to help them realign.

A really useful resource for making more room in the pelvis and for making sure that the baby is aligned well in the pelvis is [www.spinningbabies.com](http://www.spinningbabies.com)

You can help open up the pelvis by doing some of the ball exercises mentioned earlier. Figure of 8’s and hip circles are preferable to purely bouncing on the ball whereby you are more likely to impact baby into an awkward position if baby is not in a good position to start with.



**Paracetamol and Pethidine should you require...**

Paracetamol is a commonly used and safe medication to take in pregnancy and postnatally when breastfeeding. When used on your birthing journey it is most useful in the early stage, when waves are not too strong but may be stopping you from being able to sleep or rest. Some women can niggle for days or even weeks before they are ready to birth their babies with waves coming and going, stopping and starting. On these occasions paracetamol may help somewhat. Paracetamol can be taken orally or sometimes given as an injection directly into the blood stream.

Pethidine is a far stronger medication that can be requested. However with that comes more side effects. A common side effect is that it may make the birthing woman nauseous or even vomit. In an attempt to avoid this it is often given with an anti-emetic or anti-sickness drug called Stemetil. Pethidine needs to be prescribed and is given via an intramuscular injection into the buttock. It may also make the birthing woman fuzzy headed or drowsy and so it's recommended to stay in the bed/on a chair for an hour or two afterwards. However after this time you will still be able to move freely into the positions you desire for your birth, unlike with an epidural. Pethidine does cross through the placenta to baby and can cause drowsiness, with its maximum effect occurring approx. 2 hours after it has been given. For this reason pethidine is avoided in the latter stage of a woman's birthing journey. Many women wish to avoid medications in their birth experience but sometimes the woman can become exhausted if her birthing journey is taking a long time.

If you find yourself being very tired and unable to manage your waves in the early stage of your journey then pethidine may provide a short term solution to allow you to get some rest and relief so you can continue your birthing journey more energized.





### the quietness that many labouring women desire.....

The environment can massively influence a woman's birthing journey. Noise can cause increased agitation, reduced tolerance for waves and can increase the need for pharmacological analgesia. Loud noise can be very stressful. External noises are rapidly transmitted to your brain where pitch and volume are interpreted as causing alarm or conveying safety.

**THINK:** How do you feel when you hear the sirens of a Garda car/ Fire Brigade/ Ambulance? Or what about when your house alarm goes off unexpectedly? When in noisy environments there is less personal engagement, less reflection and less perseverance.

**ACTIVITIES:** For your birthing journey consider how you can reduce noise and distractions both at home and when you arrive into the birthing suite. Discuss with your partner how they can help you maintain a quiet atmosphere.

At home you will be free to create the ambience you wish for your birthing journey. Within the hospital you can still create ambience in many ways

- Bring in your own pillow
- Bring in a string of fairy lights
- Play your own music (blue tooth speakers)
- Use headphones to cut out distractions
- Bring in an aromatherapy diffuser with your chosen oils
- Create a poster with affirmations to look at
- Wear an eyemask to dull light

## Quiet Please



## Hypnobirthing in Progress





## R is for...

### **Rest and of course Relaxation...**

Towards the end of your pregnancy rest is really important! Make use of the first couple of weeks of maternity leave with lots of power naps and early nights. It is unlikely you will get a full 8-10 hours sleep in a row as pregnant women often need to go to the toilet, are woken by an active baby, or just can't get comfy with the ever expanding bump! But you can make up for the sleep disturbances with daytime naps. Listening to your hypnobirthing or just generic relaxation tracks may also aid sleep.

Being relaxed is a key component to an easier birth. If you are stressed your adrenalin increases, your heart rate increases, your breathing speeds up and your muscles become tense. While on your birthing journey this includes the muscles of your womb. They are designed to contract and retract to birth your baby. If they are tense they will not be able to work effectively, making things more difficult for you. When you are relaxed your breathing is slow and steady. Your heart rate remains normal. Your muscles do not tense up and they can work effectively to birth your baby.

Relaxation is not easy for everyone. Many of us in the modern world are busy. We have things to do, places to be, deadlines to make, people to see. Relaxation takes practice and listening to hypnobirthing tracks is one way to help you enter a relaxed state. But there are many ways you can relax.

**THINK!** What do you find helps you relax the most? How will you try to stay relaxed on your birthing journey?

**It's also for "Remifentanyl" though only used on rare occasion...**

Remifentanyl is a drug from the morphine family. It is only used when an epidural is not recommended. It is usually used because the birthing woman has had back surgery involving the part of the spine that epidurals are inserted or if she has very low platelets at the time of her birth. It is not the preferred method of pharmacological analgesia as there are many side effects (nausea, respiratory depression) and women require extra monitoring (CTG, oxygen level monitoring, oxygen supplementation). However it is an option if required.

**THINK!** Whether you plan on having pharmacological analgesia for your birth or not make a list of some of the non-pharmacological coping methods you may use on your birthing journey;

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

**Support, be doula, partner or friend.....the benefits of such support not merely a modern trend.**

While there are a few women who would rather be alone on their birthing journey, or perhaps part of it, the majority of women find having a supportive partner a key component in their positive birth experience. For some women they may want to be touched, stroked, massaged or just reassured by their chosen birth partner while others do not. However, the presence of that person knowing they are there if they needed them, is so important. The birth supporter may be guiding you through various breathing techniques. They may reassure you with positive words of encouragement or affirmations. They may help create a relaxing environment for you to birth in. They may be your advocate on your birthing journey. Whoever you choose as your support partner on your birthing journey make sure they are aware of your desires for your birth experience. Ensure they are as well informed about birth as you are in order for them to help you stay calm, be confident and be in control they need to be calm too.

**THINK!** What are the top three things you want from your birth partner on your birthing journey?

1

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2

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3

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Now go and tell them.....



**TENS machine a super little device, you can never put it on too soon would be the only advice...**

T.E.N.S. stands for transcutaneous-electronic nerve stimulation. Using a TENS machine involves placing up to 4 pads on the lower back, connecting them to a battery operated hand held device and turning it on. You will feel a sensation that varies from person to person but is often described as a buzzing, tickling, tingling or fuzzy feeling. It can be used for many reasons but when used during birthing you would hit a boost button to change the sensation. As your birthing journey becomes more intense you increase the intensity of the TENS.

It is said to work in two ways, firstly by distraction with the Gate Control theory which says your brain can only process a certain amount of stimuli at a time. Secondly, by triggering your bodies natural endorphins (pain relieving hormones) which in turn help you manage your waves. It can be used alongside most other coping mechanisms (apart from water!) and can be purchased or hired relatively cheaply from a pharmacy or online you could even borrow one from a friend and just replace the pads/batteries. T.E.N.S. machines work best when commenced early so make sure to put it on at the beginning of your birthing journey if you need to take it off for potential false alarms that's ok!

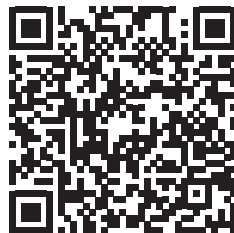


## U is for...

### **"You" the most important letter here, to trust in your ability, to conquer any fear...**

Women have been birthing baby's for a long, long, long time! You can do this, your body was made to do this. Don't fear your birth. Embrace it. Prepare for it, mentally and physically. Have your various tools ready to use on the day and if you only need one then that's fine, but if you need them all you will have them at the ready. Remember fear increases adrenaline. Adrenaline stops your body producing the natural oxytocin needed to bring on the waves to birth your baby. It also halts production of your body's endorphins (natural morphine!). While you may not be able to completely eliminate fear, you should be able to significantly reduce it. Sometimes all you need to do is acknowledge it.

**TASK!** Do you have a fear around birth? Try listening to a fear release hypnobirthing track for 3 or 4 days and see if you can reduce it.



## V is for...

### **vocalising and visualising your mission...**

You may be someone who moans and groans through their birthing journey. Harness the power of the noise and use it to help you on your birth. It is very often the guttural vowel sounds that can be helpful. It's the Ahhhhhhs, Ohhhhhhs, Eeeeeeeeees, Uuuuuuuuuuuu, llllllllllll. While high pitched screams and shouting is likely to do the opposite scare you and those around you as well as giving you a sore throat. The animalistic moans and groans can be a helpful coping tool during your birth journey.

Visualisations can also be a powerful tool. They may be created in your mind, visualising your cervix softening and opening. Visualising baby's head descending. Visualising your perineum opening and stretching. Visualisations can also be helped with printed images. An image of a flower opening from bud to full bloom. Perhaps a photo of your previous baby – providing you with your end goal! An image of a bridge, representing each wave coming, reaching a peak and going away again. An image of a wave, rolling onto the sandy beach and rolling away again. It could be of your grandmother or great grandmother, who had 14 children of her own without any pharmacological analgesia. It could be of the thousands of women birthing around the world with you.

**"Nobody said it was easy, they just said it was worth it..."**

**Harvey McKay**

### It's also for variety in posture and position.....

You may choose several different positions while you're birthing and that's ok! Your baby is trying to navigate its way out through your pelvis and that may mean getting into various positions to assist in that journey. In general, lying on your back is the worst position to be in as gravity is working against you and your baby is trying to move upwards to come through the pelvis.

Standing, squatting, sitting upright or being on all 4's are all great positions to try on your birth journey. If you find yourself getting tired then resting on your side for a short while would be preferable to laying on your back.

Some women feel restricted by tubes or wires on their birth journeys and feel they need to lay in bed but this is not true. Yes, your movement is restricted by the length of the tubes/wires but as long as you don't have an epidural and midwives can monitor your baby's heart rate you can be in whatever position feels best for you.



## W is for...

### **Water, be it pool or bath or shower, never underestimate its raw amazing power...**

Water immersion or 'Hydrotherapy' is used for many reasons to relieve aching muscles after a workout, to provide comfort when experiencing menstrual cramps, to relax after a stressful day. Women who use water immersion in their birth journey have higher levels of satisfaction with their experience, less anxiety, better positioning of their baby in their pelvis and are less likely to need medication to speed the process up. They are also more likely to birth their babies without assistance, use less analgesia and have less chances of an episiotomy and severe tears. Water can also be used in conjunction with aromatherapy and hypnosis. If the bath is not deep enough and you are unable to submerge your bump try going on all 4's or side-lying. If this is not possible use a large towel soaked in warm water and drape it across your bump or back. Ask your partner to keep pouring the warm water over the towel to keep it warm. If a bath is unavailable, sitting on a ball with the shower beating down on your back may also provide helpful relief from your waves.

**THINK!** Do you enjoy immersion in a bath? Do you find it helps you to relax? Would you have dimmed lights and music? What about a nice smelling diffuser or incense stick (not in hospital!) in the bathroom?





**X** is for...

**a letter in Reflexology, those pressure points can help reduce so much anxiety...**

Reflexology is a complementary therapy that is more than a generic foot massage! It can help with several minor ailments of pregnancy such as constipation, indigestion, water retention, sciatica, sinusitis and insomnia. Frequent treatments in pregnancy can reduce the need for induction. Reflexology can also boost your bodies natural oxytocin production reducing the duration of your birth journey as well as increasing natural endorphins enabling you to cope better. As with any complementary therapies it's important to seek out a qualified practitioner and one that specializes in pregnancy as there are some contraindications to reflexology in pregnancy.



**Y** is for...

**Yoga and perhaps Pilates too, whichever you find useful, whichever helps you through...**

Yoga is an ancient mind-body practice that is becoming recognised as a health practice for a variety of immunological, neuromuscular, psychological and pain conditions. It has been found to be beneficial in pregnancy as well as on your birth journey. It uses physical postures, breathing exercises, concentration, meditation and contemplative practice. It is thought to alter nervous system regulation and physiological system functioning and improve psychological wellbeing and physical fitness. There are many providers offering yoga classes and ideally you would attend a live class as you can be taught how to do the correct poses and be corrected if doing them wrong. However there are also many videos online for free too just make sure it is pregnancy or antenatal yoga you are doing as there are positions and poses that are not suitable for pregnancy.

**Keep all your options open you know not how things will go,  
And unless you try out all your tools you'll really never know.  
If one tool doesn't help you, don't discount the rest,  
the letter **"Z"** represents all your Zeal and Zest!**

# Hypnobirthing Stories

## Orlaiths Story

### Daily checklist!

Raspberry Tea	Raspberry Tea
Bounce on ball	Perineal massage
Breathe (suck in oxytocin)	BREATHE
Walk	Essential oils
Birthing tracks	Repeat
Breathe (suck in oxytocin)	

Ms Alice pearl arrived exactly one week past her due date. I was starting to lose patience with my daily routine. My tool bag was well and truly utilised!

After an unsuccessful sweep and an unfavourable cervix, I was penciled in for induction. I felt it was scheduled a little earlier than I had hoped. I used my BRAIN and felt I wanted to push out the induction date by a few days. Remembering Nadia's advice to try EVERYTHING, I pencilled in for some acupuncture on the Friday and on Saturday (after 14000 steps) my waters broke.

Despite initial panic, I used my BRAIN and flicked through my notes from Nadia. OK, waters clear, no smell or blood- don't panic! We took a trip into the Hospital for a quick check. Contractions hadn't started so I was happy to head home and go from there.

After a good night's sleep I laboured at home. I walked, bounced, massaged, pushed pressure points, used heat packs, had a bath, used essential oils and ironed!

I returned to the hospital 24 hours after my waters broke. Despite labouring all day, I hadn't established a consistent pattern of surges and had half convinced myself I was making it up. When I got to hospital I was put on a pre-labour ward and soon realised (by the calm demeanour of the other ladies) that I was most definitely in labour! It was time for the tens machine!

I was checked at 7pm and delighted to hear I was 4cm. Things ramped up from there and are a little blurry. That may possibly be a result of the gas! At one point I thought I wasn't able to handle the surges, my wonderful midwife helped me focus on my breathing and asked me to wait 30 minutes before deciding on any other pain relief.

It was a classic case of transitioning, at 8.30 I was 9cm! We were delighted and encouraged to hear that our girl would be born that night, but everyone was a little surprised when she arrived after one push. Two hours in active labour in total. Hypnobirthing was key for us!

With the rate of her arrival I did however have a 3rd degree tear. Although I was upset that it happened, the care I received was really phenomenal. I remember no pain from labour! I am so lucky to have had a brilliant surgeon and a fantastic physiotherapist that saw me right as rain! My pelvic floor is the same as before. I will be forever grateful for the care I received after birth. Everyone was so helpful and outraged that after birthing with just gas, I had to have spinal block for the surgery!


Our little girl has turned one, and I can, honestly, say I only have positive memories of the day. Our bodies are incredible! Trust and listen to yours, it will lead you the right way.

## **Lizzie – Birth story for Sylvie 7,**

5lbs, 30/11/19

My contractions started at 9pm on 28/11, Thanksgiving day, at 2 days OD. (Being overdue up to that point, I'd tried to rest, ate dates, had hot baths and had a good cry, but tried mainly to relax and just trust that things would get going in time). I phoned Rotunda ER and was told to hang on at home, contractions were regular but I could talk through pain. When they went to lasting 1 minute every 3 minutes by 11ish I phoned again and was told I could come in. I was assessed and told I was 1 cm dilated. I could go home or stay and go to prelabour ward. We decided to go to the prelabour ward, it being our first baby and as we were in-and it was 1am at this point. My husband and I went up to 6 bed ward. There was privacy and autonomy. Very helpful midwife was around but we could just get on with it ourselves. We used mantras, music playlists, baths, and counter pressure. My waters broke at 5am, in the bath so it was hard to tell how much.

Full hind waters broke at around 8am. All my big knickers were a bit worse for wear by this point so definitely bring a handful! I saw the medics early that morning who highlighted the timeline given my waters were gone. I may need induction if sufficient dilation hadn't occurred within the next 12 hours. They talked about when labour starts which was disconcerting as I felt like I'd been labouring all night. When measured again I was only 2 cm which was really disappointing as I was really tired by that point, 12noon the next day. There seemed to be an assumption that getting to 3cm wasn't labour yet...



I found the pain increasingly difficult, the time and lack of sleep and I was worried that I wouldn't have the energy when the second stage came. So I used the BRAIN acronym to help decide whether to have pethidine or not. I worried as I might feel nauseous but took it and it knocked me out for an hour so that was something.

I found that afternoon and early evening most difficult as contractions were hard. The urge to push was really hard to resist. I was also getting back labour. Despite the baby being in a good position, I think she was pressing down on my sciatica so my right leg was sore and the bath wasn't cutting it for pain relief anymore.

I kept using my breath, the mantras, and counterpressure. Resting in between was important. It was so important that my birth partner knew the mantras and what helped, I was so tired I couldn't keep connected to them on my own so it was down to him to help.

I was finally taken to the delivery suite at about 8pm at 6cm dilated. They asked about epidural. I showed my birth preferences sheet. I explained that I preferred not to have an epidural but I was concerned I was so tired and finding the pain really hard to bear at this time that I might need it. They were really sound, listening to my concerns and explained that there was still time for an epidural if I needed it but that I could see how I got on with gas and air. Thankfully I found that gas and air really helpful. I had only had paracetamol and one dose of pethidine up to that point.

I remember the next phase being a lot faster although my daughter wasn't born until 3am! I used our blow up ball and moved but lay on my side mainly because my leg was sore. When it came to pushing I found kneeling and leaning forward worked best. My husband was great, really coaching me at the breath, as was the midwife. She had been so respectful, leaving us to it and really taking into account our birth plan. She was great at guiding pushing and breathing. I think once baby crowned it was 3 big pushes and she was out. I felt amazing after pretty much immediately! I was so pleased I could get skin to skin and she did the breast crawl, it was amazing to experience. I delivered the after birth. I wasn't in bad shape after it all but needed 2 stitches. That was the first time since 8am the previous morning that I saw doctors, they were great. My husband got skin to skin too which was lovely.

I realise I was lucky in that a lot went my way in terms of not needing interventions and my experience lined up with my preferences. I was ready I think as much as I could be for that not to happen, and I think the education from hypnobirthing about the birth process was invaluable to that. We knew about different eventualities and therefore could make more informed decisions. The other main thing that hypnobirthing gave me were tools to stay calm and manage pain/surges and just the whole psychological upheaval of it all. Lastly, I think having a partner who was

really engaged in that journey from the beginning, got the rationale and knew the breathing, mantras and counterpressure meant he was really present and could help.

We'll forever be grateful for how Hypnobirthing helped give us such a positive experience of birth and bring our daughter into the world.

Thanks so much,  
Lizzie


## Birth Story – Neasa

I began hypnobirthing practice around week 28 of my pregnancy. Off the bat, I found that when other pregnant women spoke about finding it hard to sleep in the later stages, I wasn't having the same difficulty. I think the daily hypnobirthing tracks helped me subconsciously empty my mind for sleep. A bonus I hadn't expected.

I think it also was hugely beneficial in terms of dealing with unexpected issues (my baby was breach right up into week 38), and while I was quite upset as a section was scheduled, I found hypnobirthing recentred me. Additionally, the constant positive reinforcement might have helped turn him (along with everything else I could try; chiropractor and acupuncture appointments, baby spinning, handstands in the pool etc. etc.).

When baby FINALLY turned, the scan showed him very small, so the doctor wanted to induce the next day. I was very uncomfortable with this. Myself and my husband used the BRAIN technique to question and ask for justification for this move, which we felt wasn't adequately provided. So, an induction was delayed for another week. We felt like we were prepared to manage the situation for the best outcome for us and our baby, rather than accept, what we felt, was a knee jerk reaction i.e. immediate induction. And it paid off, as I went into spontaneous labour 2 days before the induction.

Finally, when contractions began and continuously advanced during labour, I think the hypnobirthing really allowed me believe it was possible to deliver my baby without an epidural. That's not to say it was an easy thing, and I'm pretty sure at some points during the 39 hours, I wasn't so convinced I wasn't mad to not want an epidural or a section. But I'm not sure I was capable of making the decision to even request an epidural at a certain point anyway. But even considering all this, I didn't get an epidural. That's not to judge anyone who does, whatever gets the baby out safely! In a way I feel I'm not best placed to say how the hypnobirthing worked for me, as I was so in the zone and not completely aware of what was going on (I suppose that's the ultimate indication!), but my husband assures me that I was absolutely using the breathing technique to manage each contraction and take each one as they come.



I also tried not to focus on how many, how often, or those details that might make you give up.

Speaking of partners, it would be remiss of me not to mention how the hypnobirthing class prepares them. My husband understood how integral his part in the birth was and I could not have gotten through it without his support.

I think at the end of the day the hypnobirthing is such a holistic approach to birth that it works subconsciously for you throughout the pregnancy and birth, and if practiced diligently, it manifests even when you're not quite aware. Almost, like breathing, which is interesting, as that is such an integral part to the process also.

## Ruths Birth of Louis

On my due date I went in for examination and accepted the offer of a sweep. That evening I had a "show". First contractions then started at 5.30 am. I hopped out of bed with excitement knowing that after weeks of braxton hicks this was the real deal .

I started my contraction timer that I had downloaded a few weeks prior. Contractions were about 8 minutes apart.

I woke my husband then hopped into the bath and quickly hopped back out realising it was a very uncomfortable position for me. I decided to have a quick shower and be ready for the day ahead.

Contractions remained at 8 minute intervals for the morning which I spent on my birthing ball watching friends, chilling out, using my tens machine and incorporating my breathing exercises when necessary.

I made the journey to the hospital at about 8pm that evening (I would have liked to stay home longer but I knew if I waited any longer the car journey would be too uncomfortable).

On examination I was 3 cm dilated so admitted straight to the labour ward.

I continued to labour upright on my ball while my husband massaged my back with some of the techniques we learnt in class. I had my essential oils with me and calming music playing.

I was open to having examinations as I wanted to know my progress, however when I was slow to progress the midwives were keen to break my waters. I refused first couple of times, however I gave in on the third time (it was 3 am and I was tired at this stage ). After my waters broke the contractions suddenly got stronger so I opted for the epidural. Unfortunately, I had a little reaction to the epidural -itching, temperature raising and some rigors so I was not able to rest much.

At 12.30PM I was 10cm dilated and ready to push. Assistance was called for

after 10 minutes and suddenly the whole room was filled with doctors and midwives due to my son struggling a bit and I needed ventouse assistance to deliver him. My son was born at 12.55.

Thanks to the hypnobirthing course I understood exactly what was happening so there was no fear or worry when the room filled with staff and I understood the delivery methods being offered to me so I could make an informed choice in what I did and did not want.

Thankfully my son had the assistance he required when he was born (a lot of suctioning) and there was not a bother on him.

On reflection of my first birth, if I could change one thing, I wish I remembered to ask for pethidine on arrival to the hospital. I feel this would have let me have a rest and I might of had less interventions.

My experience during my first birth also led me to have in my opinion a perfect second birth, I knew exactly what I wanted, my midwife was amazing and so accommodating to let me try birth the baby the way I wanted to and everything including recovery went so smoothly.

## Jens Birth Story

I found hypnobirthing through the recommendation of a midwife at an early appointment! To be honest, it wasn't something I knew much about and I have to admit I am not very into meditation so I was sceptical about how much it would influence my birth!

I signed up for the course and honestly it was the best thing I could have done for myself and my pregnancy! I quickly found out that it wasn't just about meditation, it was informative and empowering! I went into the last few weeks of my pregnancy knowing my options and feeling in control. I didn't use the tracks but I found the mantra stuck in my head and I was confident I could do labour!

The day came and when the surges started I was calm and in the zone! I had visions of me sitting on my ball listening to music and getting massages but I was more comfortable walking the house :) I laboured at home and after a call with the midwives I headed into the hospital. I was 3cm and ready to go! The hospital was busy so I was in the emergency department for a good few hours, not ideal but I was going with the flow and I had my husband, my Hynobirthing breathing techniques and gas and air so I was happy out.

After a few hours we got to the delivery room, I was 7cm (and still pacing the room and breathing). At this point I was getting tired and I did consider getting the epidural but during the discussion I turned to my husband and said the baby is coming! Before I knew it I was pushing with the amazing support of my midwife and my husband! My gorgeous girl came into this world naturally and safe and sound. I was calm, confident and in control throughout and honestly it was because I was so well informed and prepared because of the hypnobirthing course! I would recommend it to anyone, even the sceptics like me before I did it :) thank you Nadia :)

## Mary Hypnobirthing Story

I knew very early in my pregnancy that I wanted to try hypnobirthing. I had heard about it through other women's stories and was eager to give it a go. While I did the course late into my third trimester, I started listening to the tracks from about 28 weeks. I would lie in my bed with my hand on my bump and smile as I listened to the positive affirmations about how each surge would bring me closer to meeting my baby, who I loved. I thought about how, even though I had never been pregnant before, my body just knew what to do. My baby was growing and thriving and labour was just part of that same natural process. Through hypnobirthing, I started to rewrite the narrative I had been told for so many years about labour being something to dread, an unpleasant experience with a happy result, to something I looked forward to and felt confident about.

In my birth preference, I noted that I was open to all forms of pain relief. I asked for delayed cord clamping and support with breastfeeding. I had a playlist ready (music from my pre-natal yoga class!) and the hypnobirthing tracks downloaded to my phone. My Husband participated in the Hypnobirthing class with me and together we knew how to use our B.R.A.I.N to tackle any situation that might come our way.

When my waters broke in the middle of the night, my Husband helped to put my TENS machine on, put the suitcases in the car and drove me to the Rotunda. While I had initially planned to labour at home for as long as possible, my contractions were coming quicker and more intensely than I had anticipated and I asked to be admitted into the hospital and was offered pethidine. I knew this was the right decision for me and felt confident in making this choice in the moment.

Alone in the hospital, I called for a midwife when I felt the urge to push. She told me to ring my partner and I quickly found myself being whisked to the labour ward and offered an epidural. It was 4 hours since I had arrived to hospital and I was 8cm dilated. I asked the midwife - "Is this as hard as it gets? Because I can do this!" before deciding I did not want or need the epidural. I felt my hypnobirthing helped me in that moment not because I was turning down the pain relief but because I had confidence in my body and in my decision.

My husband soon appeared at my side and within about 2 hours, without any additional intervention, our son was born. I reached out as the midwives pulled him up towards my chest and he took his first breaths and let out a cry. It was the best moment of my life. Labour was powerful, intense and beautiful. I hope all mothers, regardless of the way their babies come into the world, can feel as I strong and empowered as I did in that moment.



## Kittys Birth Story

My birth certainly did not go how I was expecting, but I still reflect on it as a very positive experience, thanks to hypnobirthing. The main benefits were that I was able to make informed decisions using the BRAIN framework and remained as calm as possible throughout. Breathing is everything!!


My first birth had been in London at a wonderful nhs birth Centre and was 36 hours long. I managed 33 hours at home and arrived to find I was 10cm! I had 'dabbled' in hypnobirthing, reading one of the books and found the birth an empowering and positive experience, although there were moments of panic and due to the length of time was really exhausting. If I'm honest thought my second birth would be more or less a replica of my first - how wrong could I be?!

Fast forward 2.5 years and we had moved to Dublin by the time I was pregnant with my second. The maternity care here is generally consultant lead, and you have to give birth in the labour ward as there are no Birth Centres unfortunately. There are also different levels of care depending on how much you pay, what insurance you have etc. I was lucky enough to be in an area covered by a community midwife dominio scheme ( you alternate appointments between GP and community midwife clinic) so was pleased to have found a route that was as midwife lead as possible and as close to my nhs experience.

The hospital I attended (The Rotunda) also offered a hypnobirthing course which my husband and I attended. This was very useful as we were able to understand the hospital's specific policy in certain areas regarding induction etc, and we got a tour of the labour ward which was so useful as I could see the kind of room I would give birth in. The midwife helpfully explained how the room could be adapted to create a more relaxing and less clinical environment, and how the bed could be altered to allow for a more upright birthing position.

My midwife at a routine 30 week appointment measured my tummy slightly big, and as I already had an additional scan booked at 32 weeks, (my placenta was low lying at my 20 week scan), they asked that the baby be measured again then. The sonographer also measured the baby large, which meant I was tested for gestational diabetes. Thankfully I got the all clear but additional sizing scans were then required, and my care was transferred to the doctors in hospital. I felt a shift in policy and the doctors were very keen to talk about induction at 40 weeks. I used my BRAIN and did a lot of research about whether induction for possible large sizing was advisable.

My conclusion was that I was going to refuse induction on the basis of sizing as the scans can notoriously be inaccurate, my first baby was a very normal



7lb 15, and the world health organization specifically says induction for suspected large babies should not be carried out. I was confident I could birth my baby whatever the size! I found I really had to 'fight' the doctors about this and had more senior consultants brought into my appointments as I think it was slightly unusual for people to go against doctors advise. They did eventually agree, as I was quite insistent and they admitted I had done my research! The result of this was that my blood pressure was quite high in these appointments, and took several readings to come down to an acceptable level. I knew it was because I was having quite stressful and confrontational conversations where I felt I had to fight my corner in order to avoid an induction which I'm sure was not right for me or my baby.

(You'll see from the summary at the top that the baby was large at almost 10lb, and the scans were correct in this instance, but I'm still glad I was not induced!)

Thankfully my labour started spontaneously and I wasn't subjected to more pressure for induction due to being 'overdue'.

5.30pm Water broke with a trickle. I called the Midwife's who said I should go to hospital for a CTG within a couple of hours to monitor how the baby was coping, and that if labour did not start in 24 hours I would be induced due to the risk of infection. I was also tested for strep b, and told if it was found I would also be induced immediately (using my BRAIN I immediately knew I would accept these reasons for induction, should they become necessary.)

8pm Had the continuous monitoring for 20 mins at hospital which showed the baby was fine. During this time I felt mild surges. Returned home by 9pm

10.30pm Once home the surges started to ramp up and the Contraction timing app told me I was in established labour. We decided to head back to the hospital as I knew second time labour can happen quickly despite my marathon first labour. I accepted an examination as I felt things were progressing quickly. I was found to be 2cm so decided to stay in the pre-labour ward instead of heading home again. Even the walk to my bed intensified things.

Very quickly I felt the surges come thick and fast so accepted a further examination and was 4cm so went up to the labour ward.

Once in my room my husband set about turning off all the lights and putting out our LED candles but to be honest I felt like pushing almost immediately.

It felt like we were in the room a few minutes and the midwife became concerned that the babies heart rate had dropped and wasn't recovering between the contractions, and she pushed the emergency bell at 11.58pm

Immediately the room filled with what felt like about 20 people. The lights were turned on and I was told in no uncertain terms to turn onto my back (not an easy task!) and my feet were put in stirrups. The obstetrician quickly explained that the baby was in danger and needed to come out quickly. She would need to perform an episiotomy and use a ventouse suction cup. She then said if that didn't work I would need a emergency c-section but noted I didn't have any epidural. She performed the cut (which I honestly did not feel at all despite only having gas and air as pain relief). She was about to use the suction cup and one of the midwives said she thought I could push the baby out, so with all my might (as I really didn't want any further intervention, or an emergency c-section with a general anesthetic )I pushed and my son was born at 12.13, 15 minutes after the emergency bell was pressed.

I was in an absolute daze but my baby was whisked into the corner for resuscitation. I was growing more and more concerned that I hadn't heard a cry, but someone explained the baby doctors had put a tube down his throat to help him breath as he was having some difficulty and that meant he couldn't cry. He was then quickly taken away to icu for further care.

For some reason (possibly hypnobirthing, possibly post labour hormones and euphoria), I felt 100% positive that everything was going to be ok, and quite calm that the doctors were going to look after him well.

This was the case and after 3 days in intensive care and special baby care unit, with brain scans, IV antibiotics etc we were allowed home. The care we received was absolutely outstanding and we will always be so grateful for this.


This may sound like quite a traumatic experience, but I would prefer to use the word 'intense'. I know everybody involved in my actual labour was trying to follow my desires stated in the birth plan, but equally I knew when that had to go out the window in order for our baby to be safely delivered.

I never felt like such a warrior and feel so so proud of myself for the way I birthed my baby. I would honestly go through it all again tomorrow as our son is so prefect and completes our family.

## Ciaras Birth Story

W is for water, which in my case was the shower.

The lovely hot water had such a naturally calming and soothing effect on me. I had been on the ward swaying and moving around but as the surges started to get stronger I decided to give the shower a go. I love having baths as I find that they help me to de-stress and relieve tension/pain too. I had been disappointed that there wasn't a



birthing pool in the Rotunda but I didn't know a shower could have been as effective as it was.

There was a little seat in the shower so I sat on that (between surges), held the hose and put the water on my legs and tummy while still conserving my energy. I was able to focus on my breathing but also just on the lovely hot water. It wasn't difficult to stay calm.

When I felt the surges coming I stood up, gave the hose to my husband and leaned on the bar in the shower. My husband put water on my back, put pressure on my lower back with the palm of his hand (something that just felt right at the time) and read the partner's script to me. The hot water, the pressure and having the positive words from the script to focus on, meant that the surges were very manageable. After each one it was so nice to sit back down and let the water soothe and relax me again as I built up my energy for the next surge.

I felt completely in control and then before I knew it I felt like pushing and when the midwife heard this she quickly checked me and we couldn't believe that I was at 10cms!

I was put in a wheelchair then and run down to the delivery suite. Here I still felt completely in control and just focused on what felt natural; moving and breathing and resting between surges. Before I knew it the midwives were telling me what to do and she was crowning!

I have never felt so naturally euphoric as I felt after the birth as well as being completely present and in control. It was a wonderful feeling.

## Nidhis Birth Story


We found out we were pregnant in August 2020, the pandemic was on a hiatus and things were open and hopeful. We thought it would definitely be gone by the time we would have our baby in April 2021 and we'd have plenty of help from our parents who live in India. Come January, the pandemic was raging at its worst and we were in the middle of the longest lockdown. It ended up being a very lonely pregnancy. In February we took the hypnobirthing course, really went in not knowing what it was about and not expecting anything except some support. The course came at a time when I had just started accepting that it was going to be a lonely birth and I wouldn't have any support from my mom.

When we did the course with Nadia, it not only informed us about the process of birth and gave us hypnobirthing tips, more importantly it empowered me as a first time mom and gave direction to my partner as a first time dad.

It guided us better than either of our moms would have. We were in control and no more the helpless, lost first time parents.

I listened to the tracks every single night, they calmed me down and helped me sleep restfully. My favourite affirmation was "I am born to birth". It gave me confidence that my body knew what was to come. My partner understood better what I needed. He offered me regular massages and knew all the strokes. He also helped me pack the hospital bag and wasn't lost about it when the time came.

As a first time mother, I repeatedly heard that baby usually arrives later than the due date. So when I went to bed the night of the 24th of April (2 days before my due date) I didn't really expect that my baby would be in my arms the next day. My surges started shortly after midnight and I woke my partner up. He sprung into action, made me comfy with whatever I needed, played the tracks for me, soothing music, put on the aroma diffuser and gave me massages. He helped me put the tens machine on and then reminded me of the breathing techniques. We had decided to labour at home for as long as possible. We rang the hospital just to be sure who also advised us to stay at home. Between massages and breathing exercises, the night went quickly. Around 6 am, my partner drew me a bath. Few minutes in there and suddenly my surges went from every 6 min to every 4. I knew it was time to leave. After reaching the hospital, we were delighted to know that I had dilated to 3cm and a little surprised to know my waters had gone. But mostly happy that my partner could join me. Upon entering the delivery suite at about 8.40am, things went a bit fast and furious. The surges started to get more intense and with less and less time between two surges. I was given the epidural leaflet but told them that I will try to manage it on my own until the afternoon and then I will consider. The midwife predicted I would have my baby by afternoon. I remember thinking, wow that fast. Little did I know what was to ensue. I was told that because I couldn't tell them when my waters went, I'd have to be kept on continuous monitoring for the first two hours. Of course nobody knew that the baby was going to make her way even before those two hours passed. I tried to manage my surges by focussing and being with my pain, humming and breathing. Then things became a bit too intense and I had a 5 min long contraction. As I couldn't stay still through it, the CTG moved which led to loss of readings on the screen and a panic. An emergency team was called. Through all this, I was still feeling calm deep within me and so was my partner. I knew I was ready to push but because it hadn't even been 2 hours since I was told I was 3 and only 15-20 min since I was told I was 6 cm, nobody expected that I was ready. I was being prepped for an emergency but I knew I didn't need it and all I wanted was to push my baby out. The doctor finally confirmed the same. 15 min later, I had my baby in my arms. I listened to my body and my body listened to me. There were a few screams and I wouldn't say I was the poster image of hypnobirthing but it definitely gave me immense confidence. The confidence kept me and



my partner calm through the emergency panic. Following the birth, I was told that my baby had to be given antibiotics as I didn't know when the waters went. Again hypnobirthing came in handy. I had the confidence to ask them for alternatives. Being an immunologist myself I knew the harms of early antibiotic use even though it's a life saver when really needed. I pressed on for alternatives and the result was frequent monitoring of my baby girl for temperature and signs of infection. Of course everything was fine in the end.

The birth definitely did not check all the points on my birth plan but it was an extremely empowering experience. It could have gone totally opposite to our expectations but being informed made us feel empowered and allowed us to take control. The result was a perfect birthing experience of a perfect baby who will now get all the benefits of the micro biome she inherited from her mother. During my labour I found hypnobirthing breath work to be extremely beneficial.

## **AnnMarie's Birth Story B is for breathing**

When my labour started with my second child I was a little nervous, as I knew I was doing it this time round with no epidural and I worried that I wouldn't be able to remember everything I learned about hypno birthing, but then I told myself I can do this, my body is made to do this, and I intuitively started to control my breathing. Straight away it slowed down my heart rate and calmed my nerves, it also helped distract me from the contractions as I was focused on my breathing, so they felt less intense.

When I got checked in I was given the gas and air and I continued to take long slow breaths, always focusing on my breathing and imagining I was breathing my baby down. Before I knew it I had gone from 2cm to 10cm and his head was out, I honestly couldn't believe it! Me and my body worked together and breathed this little guy into the world. No effort, no pushing, no stress. Such a peaceful and beautiful experience.

I recommend anyone thinking about hypnobirthing, don't give it a second thought. Your body is made to do this.



