

Hypnotherapy in childbirth

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Hypnotherapy in childbirth refers to the use of hypnotherapy to assist in the birthing process. This practice, known as hypnobirthing, functions on the premise that most labour-related pain is the result of fear and tension, which can be diminished^[1] or anecdotally eliminated with hypnotherapy. Research into this practice has found reductions in pain during birthing,^{[1][2]} Hypnobirthing may also impact the duration of labour and reduces surgical interventions during delivery.^[3]

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Theory

Hypnotherapy during childbirth is based on the theory that to experience an easy and comfortable birth, women need to have an understanding of the way in which the uterus functions naturally during normal childbirth when unencumbered by fear, along with the ill effects of the fear-tension-pain cycle on the birthing process. Birthing women and their support partners are taught non-pharmacological strategies, such as relaxation, meditation and visualisation, that allow the body to birth normally without restrictions to assist in less painful, easier, more comfortable birthing.^{[4][5][6][7][8][9]}

History

In 1942, *Childbirth without Fear* was published; written by English obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read. The book introduced the idea of using hypnotherapy for childbirth.^[10]

Obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read first wrote about the use of hypnosis to reduce pain in the 1930s in his work on natural childbirth and since the 1980s a range of different techniques have been developed that utilize hypnosis in a natural childbirth.

Research

Hypnosis is generally considered a controversial treatment. There have been studies refuting claims that hypnosis is effective in reducing or eliminating pain during childbirth. A 2004 research review found insufficient evidence to show that the technique is effective,^[11] and two 2012 Cochrane reviews found that there was insufficient evidence to determine whether hypnosis is effective in managing or treating pain in childbirth or postnatal depression.^{[12][13]}

However, there have been studies confirming the claims that, compared to general population figures, hypnosis and self-hypnosis during childbirth leads to:^{[5][14][15]}

- decreased average length of labour
- lower cesarean section rates
- decreased use of pain relief medication such as gas and epidurals
- increased ease and comfort of labour and birth (self-reported and observed)
- greater emotional satisfaction for mothers as a result of having their birthing partners informed, involved and supportive.

In addition to this, the majority of women experiencing hypnosis during childbirth in their second or subsequent births report feeling more in control, confident, relaxed and focused, and less fearful, than during their other birthing experiences.^{[15][16][17]}

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