

Complementary therapies for pregnancy

Treatment during pregnancy will not only contribute to your comfort, relaxation and well-being, but it can also provide a more settled, balanced and healthy environment for your unborn baby. As well as enhancing your overall state of health and well-being, getting treatment while pregnant can help identify and remedy any individual problems that may be relevant to birth, and foster a relaxed and positive approach to the birth process itself. In addition, you can have many therapies during labour itself.

CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY

This gentle therapy can be used at all stages of pregnancy. It is useful for releasing physical and emotional restrictions, stresses and strains, as well as bringing the mind, body and spirit into a greater sense of harmony. It can also help ensure free mobility of the pelvis, to enable easier passage of the baby through the birth canal. The unborn baby will also benefit from treatment, and it is especially effective on releasing birth trauma in newborns too.

MASSAGE

Once you are past your first trimester, massage can be a useful way to ease away some of the aches, pains and strains of pregnancy, as well as being relaxing for both mother and baby.

The following are some other therapies you may consider:

ACUPUNCTURE

This is an ancient therapy, originating in China, that uses fine needles to stimulate the energy channels of the body to release blockages which are restricting the free flow of 'qi' or energy, thereby freeing the body to heal itself. It can provide an effective form of pain relief before, during and after labour.

HYPNOSIS

Hypnotherapists can teach you self-hypnosis for labour, to help you to modify your perception of contractions so that the pain becomes manageable, or to superimpose images of pleasant situations and places on top of the pain in order to minimise it. You will have to practise the techniques during your pregnancy to be able to use them effectively during labour.

HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is an extremely safe and gentle form of medicine which can be used to treat anyone of any age, from tiny babies to 90-year-old grannies. It works on the principle that 'like cures like'.

Additional resources

Before you make any decision, it is important that you are well-informed. Your primary caregiver, ie/ your doctor or midwife, should be able to provide you with reading material as well as connect you to other resources and organisations. There are many books, leaflets, classes and videos to help with your choices – not only about birth, but also for your newborn baby. But most importantly, birth can be one of the most beautiful and profound experiences you will ever have – enjoy this wonderful gift of life!

Some useful websites include:

<http://www.babyworld.co.uk/>

<http://www.birthchoiceuk.com/>

<http://www.childbirth.org/>

<http://www.midwiferytoday.com/>

<http://www.gentlebirth.org/ronnie/homesafe.html>

<http://www.babycenter.com/>

About the author

Stephanie Fowler BSc (Hons) RCST Dip.ITEC is a registered craniosacral and massage therapist, and tutors at the College Of Cranio-Sacral Therapy in London. She has also done specialised training with the Upledger Institute focusing on the body's viscera (internal organs) and is a Tai Chi instructor.

She currently practises in East London at Hackney Forge, entrance Banbury Rd, 243a Victoria Park Rd, London E9, and in North London at Vibrance Health Clinic, 126 Hampden Road, London N8, which is close to Turnpike Lane Station. Home visits are also available.

Please telephone 07946 344672
or email fowler.steph@gmail.com

for more details, for free advice,
or to book an appointment

Preparing for home birth *advice for expectant mothers*



Including information on

- Safety
- Considerations
- Prenatal care
- Support
- Practical preparations
- Complementary therapies

How safe is a home birth?

In most cultures throughout history, women have given birth at home. Not only do most women feel more relaxed in their own familiar and safe environment, it allows the birth to become an integral part of family life.

In terms of safety, one study, which compared nearly 25,000 births from five different countries, found no difference in survival rates between babies born at home and those born in the hospital. However, it was found that fewer medical interventions occurred in the home birth group, with home-born babies generally in a healthier condition. Home-birth mothers were also less likely to suffer lacerations during birth, and were less likely to have been induced, had Caesarean sections or forcep deliveries.

In fact, home births may even be safer for newborns as exposure to life-threatening infections that occur in the hospital is drastically reduced.

Considerations

If you are healthy and have had an uncomplicated pregnancy, the most important factor in opting for home birth is that it is your choice. The most successful home birthers are those who have a strong commitment to it and who trust in their body's natural ability to birth.

In some cases, giving birth at home may not be advisable. While a home birth may still be possible, it is important to talk to your midwife or doctor if you have a medical condition or special need, such as diabetes or blood disorders, or if your baby is breech, you are having twins or have had a previous Caesarean birth.

For some mothers, the comfort of home and familiar surroundings can be very supportive and promote an easy birth. Others may feel uneasy that more technical medical assistance isn't at hand. But with a skilled midwife and a non-meddlesome approach, home birth can be a rewarding and safe option for most women.

Prenatal care

Prevention is better than cure, and when it comes to giving birth – diet, exercise and overall physical and emotional well-being are important preventative measures. Antenatal classes are a great resource, with information on what to expect in labour and birth, and some will also include sessions on pain management through breathing or movement. They also provide support and networking with other pregnant women.

DIET

Eating well and giving up smoking during pregnancy are the two most significant ways to avoid a low birth weight baby. You should eat a balanced diet of around 2000 calories, rising to 2200 in the last three months. Prescription as well as social drugs, including alcohol, should be avoided unless necessary. Towards the end of your pregnancy, to help your body cope with the physical demands of labour, base small, regular meals around complex carbohydrates, which take longer to digest and so release energy at a constant rate.

EXERCISE

Exercising while pregnant not only prepares the body for labour, it's also good for the unborn baby – helping deliver a healthier baby with a stronger fetal heart rate. It has also been shown to reduce time spent in labour. Active Birth classes and gentle Yoga can teach you how to use movement and gravity to help with labour. Here are some exercise guidelines:

- Start slowly, and don't overdo it. Avoid exercising in extreme heat or cold, and drink lots of water
- As the pregnancy progresses, reduce the intensity level
- The body becomes more flexible in preparation for birth, but this can lead to strains. Keep stretching, but don't overdo it
- In the last trimester, avoid ballistic movements, such as jumping or running. Swimming is a good form of gentle aerobic exercise
- Do your Kegel, or pelvic floor exercises, regularly

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL PREPARATION

A woman who is relaxed and at ease mentally and emotionally, as well as physically, will give birth more easily than a woman who is tense, worried, fearful, pressurised or under-prepared. It is partly for these reasons why home births can be easier for many women. Learning meditation or relaxation techniques, especially ones that focus on the breath, can provide a good grounding. Avoiding conflict and arguments will be helpful both for you and the baby. Importantly – relax and enjoy this special time!

GETTING YOUR BABY IN THE RIGHT POSITION

By paying attention to your posture and movements in late pregnancy, it is possible to encourage the baby into the optimal birthing position. A correct presentation can help reduce the need for medical intervention.

Support

Your main support will be your midwife, who must be skilled and confident in home births, and prepared for any potential problems – including having any necessary equipment both on hand and fully functioning. You can either use a Community Midwife through the NHS, or an independent one. You do not need your GP's support, although they may agree to be present at the birth if you want them to. A birth partner can provide support and encouragement as well as dealing with practical issues, and if you have children around, make sure there is an adult to look after them too.

Practical preparations for the birth

While the following is by no means exhaustive, it can give a few ideas of things to prepare. Your midwife can advise you further. You may want to make a birth plan for the midwife detailing your wishes beforehand, including drug choices, such as whether you want oxytocin, or Vitamin K for the baby.

FOOD AND DRINK

Many sources recommend energy-giving drinks such as fruit juice and water, with perhaps glucose tablets. Bendy straws are invaluable for sipping drinks, and if you want food, eat it – and if there's anything you think you might fancy, have it nearby.

PAIN RELIEF

You cannot know how you are going to experience the pain of any one labour until you are actually in labour. It makes sense to have a 'toolkit' of pain relief options available beforehand, whether this includes drugs or not. While you might not use any of them on the day, knowing that it is there may help. Moving, massage, warm water and aromatherapy are a few natural ways to ease pain.

IF YOU ARE USING A BIRTH POOL

Delivery in water can be very effective at reducing pain, and can help the labour run more smoothly. However, make sure that you have a practice run assembling and filling the pool before labour. Don't leave it until the day of the labour!

EMERGENCY BAG

If you are comfortable with the idea, you could pack an emergency hospital bag in case you need to transfer to hospital. This would be the same as for a standard hospital birth, with maternity sanitary pads, newborn nappies, juice, glucose tablets, camera and film...

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

If you want to use aromatherapy, herbal or homeopathic remedies for specific labour circumstances, make sure you have them to hand – and let your birth partner know where they are too.