



Think your way to a relaxed birth

The female body is designed to give birth, but fear can often interfere with the process, according to HypnoBirthing practitioner Steve Griffiths. One of the reasons is that pain inhibits the creation of endorphins – the body's natural painkillers – and also the birth hormone oxytocin which causes the uterus to contract and push the baby out.

Whenever you are afraid, blood, which carries vital oxygen, is diverted away from the uterus and so it cannot work properly. "It's like when you over exercise a muscle and it hurts," says Steve. "It is caused by the muscle not getting enough oxygen."

Stress hormones called catecholamines are also produced, delaying labour because the brain does not distinguish between real and imagined fears and responds as if under threat.

Hypnosis brings about a deeply relaxed state and enables pregnant

women to feel more confident and in control. In this state, pain is significantly reduced and, in 10 per cent of cases, women report a pain free birth, Steve says.

"Everybody can be hypnotised," he says. "It is a natural state and can be self-induced. People who are able to visualise well make the best patients, but it is a skill that can be learned.

"I ask patients to imagine themselves in a future, after they have had their child, when everything has gone well. In our culture, everyone has a horror story, but that need not be the case."

● Contact HypnoBirthing practitioners Steve Griffiths and Jill Wootton at Sussex Natural Childbirth: 01273 412009; www.naturalchildbirth.co.uk. A course of four or five sessions costs £250. See www.hypnobirthing.co.uk for more information about techniques and your nearest practitioner.