

Questions and Myths about calmbirth®



What is calmbirth®?

calmbirth® is the name given to a childbirth preparation programme developed by midwife Peter Jackson to specifically assist couples to create a calm, joyful and even ecstatic birth experience. The calmbirth® programme has the potential to dismantle the fear, stress and anxiety experienced by many women during pregnancy and childbirth.

The three important foundation factors addressed by calmbirth® for natural childbirth are
understanding,
confidence
fearlessness.

The knowledge and skills the programme teaches prepares the mother to remain relaxed and focused during her labour, to make informed choices, if and when necessary and to be in tune with the natural energy and rhythm of her baby's birth.

The calmbirth® programme is based upon observation, research and clinical experience. The three main areas covered in the programme are:

- One of the foundational principles of calmbirth® is Dr Grantly Dick Read's "Fear – Tension – Pain syndrome which is supported by contemporary research scientists such as Dr Candice Pert and Dr Bruce Lipton.
- Dr Herbert Benson's extensive research into the normal physiological response of Relaxation which is the opposite to the well know fight and flight response which Dr Grantly Dick Read accurately described in his Fear – Tension – Pain syndrome. The programme highlights the importance of self care and use of the person's subconscious resources to create confidence, understanding and to dismantle fears not only around labour and birth but for all areas of life.
- Bonding and Conscious Parenting draws on the research findings of Dr David Chamberlain, Dr Bruce Lipton and Dr Thomas Verny to name a few. Their evidence shows the importance of pre natal education and the relationship between the mother, father and baby.

What are the benefits of calmbirth®?

People leave the classes with a greater understanding of the birth process, confidence in their own ability to work with the birth process and excitement about their approaching birth. We receive many emails, cards, letters which anecdotally confirm that couples, given the right preparation can create a very special birth experience, even if medical intervention is required.

Does it completely guarantee a pain-free labour and birth?

calmbirth® helps couples understand one of the main reasons why pain is created in the first place. We have anecdotal evidence to support the fact that with this knowledge, some mothers can experience what they call a pain free birth, keeping in mind that these mothers also report they experience sensations of pressure and muscular activity which can be intense at times but according to them "not painful".

However this is not the case with all mothers. It seems it requires a leap of faith for the mother to completely trust her body to create this experience.

The evidence from Dr Sarah Buckley, Dr Michel O'dent and others suggests that when a mother's body reaches peak levels of birthing hormones **and there is no fear**, then their labour and birth can be experienced in a most profoundly joyful way.

Does calmbirth® work for everyone?

calmbirth® is a model of interaction. In a sense "IT" does not work. Rather it is the pregnant couples who understand how marvellously the mother's body is designed, who develop the confidence to work with their birth process rather than resist it and finally, to eliminate fear these are the couples who are more likely to create a birth experience unforgettably joyful, calm and even ecstatic.

We are so used to saying "the epidural worked or the medication worked" The reality is that all those things help the person to achieve their goal.

How can I find a calmbirth® Practitioner.

There are now over 90 registered calmbirth® practitioners in Australia and New Zealand. Contact details for registered practitioners can be found on the calmbirth register www.calmbirthregister.com.au

There is an emphasis on taking away the pain, we are setting women up to fail?

In the calmbirth® classes the pregnant couple explore one of the main reasons why pain is created in the first place. In the basic information imparted to the pregnant couples and the skills taught, the sensations of labour can be seen more in their true light as muscle sensation albeit intense at times. Couples are able to distinguish between hard work and pain. They are reassured that no matter what path their labour and birth take, there are no failures, just different birth journeys just as there are different life journeys. Even if unforeseen circumstances arise, the skills taught in the classes assist the couple to remain calm and focused and bring out of that experience the joy of bringing their baby into the world.

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Is there any scientific research that has studied the effects of calmbirth® on labour and birth?

Since the inception of calmbirth® research is being carried out by sending out evaluation forms to couples after the birth of their baby.

This survey has shown that out of the 411 calmbirth® mothers

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| 63.5% normal vaginal birth | 12.9% normal vaginal birth with assistance |
| 13.6% emergency caesarean | 6.6% planned caesarean |
| 50% had no analgesia or anesthetic during their labour | |
| 22.4% who did use analgesia, used gas only. | |
| 34% reported that generally they would <i>not</i> describe the sensations they experienced during labour as painful | |
| 22% describing their pain as mild or moderate. | |
| 81% were able to breastfeed soon after birthing | |
| 87% felt a strong bond with their baby immediately after birth | |

How does woman's preconceived idea of childbirth as painful inhibit her experience and affect the baby's experience of birth?

Belief controls biology via the emotions. i.e. when a woman believes that childbirth will be painful then the emotion of fear is triggered and it is the fear that alters the physiology as described above. Contemporary science demonstrates that the mother communicates with her baby biochemically. The same hormones that are released in the mother's body by her fearful belief system (adrenaline) crosses the placenta and stimulates a similar response in the baby.

How does a calm birth make for a better start to the mother/baby relationship?

Mothers are great teachers and perhaps the words of a mother who experienced a "calm birth" brings into focus the answer to your question.

Lisa said.....

"The birth was an unexplainable incredible experience. I felt total calmness and confidence throughout the entire birth. Our beautiful little girl was born exactly as I'd hoped and now at 16 weeks she is an incredible little soul. From the beginning she has been an excellent sleeper. I feel truly blessed and proud that her entry into the world was a calm, joyful and loving experience for us all. It is a day and an experience that I will always remember with absolute joy".

In scientific terms, how does the mother/baby relationship benefit?

When her baby's birth is experienced as calm and joyous, a mother has a deeper emotional capacity to bond with her baby.

"From a recent DVD entitled "What Babies Want" which features a number of prominent researchers into child development and psychology, it states that life patterns are established at birth and before. Research is now showing us that our society is a product of how we welcome and raise our children. When babies are welcomed with love and warmth and given the immediate opportunity to bond with their parents, they develop minds that are coherent and flexible, ready in turn to make compassionate and meaningful connections with others as they grow." (Kindred Magazine, Dec/Feb 2006/7, p2)

Scientifically, how does the baby benefit when childbirth is calm?

During the last few months of pregnancy, during labour and childbirth, there is an incredible amount of imprinting occurring for both the baby and the mother. The mother is not only providing nutrients for the baby, she is also providing information. She is preparing her baby for the environment into which he/she will arrive. If the mother is calm and confident during pregnancy and birth, then this is already preparing her baby to be a calm and confident human being. On the other hand if she is stressed and anxious the biochemical interaction during pregnancy labour and birth can set up a different perception for that baby about life. How it happens sets up a pattern which can be repeated over and over again. (Lipton, B. 2005, *The Biology of Belief*, Mountain of Love/Elite Books, Santa Rosa, California.)

What are your tips for a woman approaching birth?

1. Trust your body to birth your baby
2. Prepare for the birth, physically emotionally and mentally
3. Just let it unfold, work with the birth process rather than try to consciously control it.
4. It's a team effort between you, your baby and your partner and your caregivers.
5. Inform yourself, knowledge is a great antidote for fear.
6. Make sure the caregivers you use will support you in your birth preferences and wishes
7. The place you choose to give birth is important, do a little research into the various options available.

Do calmbirth® classes take the place of hospital childbirth education classes.

The calmbirth® programme is an entirely different programme to those run in hospitals and birth centres. Registered calmbirth® practitioners have been through a training process and are qualified to teach the calmbirth® model of childbirth preparation. Couples attending calmbirth® classes are encouraged to become informed of the content of the classes conducted in the place they are to give birth then make up their own minds whether to attend the hospital classes in consultation with their care givers.

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We don't need to teach breathing, women know how to breathe.

True. But science suggests that conscious, controlled breathing alters the chemicals in the body in a positive way. Candice Pert explains it this way in her book "Molecules of Emotion"

"The techniques employed by both the yogi and the woman in labour are extremely powerful. There is a wealth of data showing that changes in the rate and depth of breathing produce changes in the quantity and kind of peptides that are released from the brain stem and since many of these peptides are endorphins, the body's natural opiates as well as other pain relieving substances you soon achieve a reduction of pain. So it is no wonder that so many modalities both ancient and new have discovered the power of controlled breathing. The peptide respiratory link is well documented; virtually any peptide found anywhere else can be found in the respiratory centre. This substrate may provide the scientific rationale for the powerful healing effects of consciously controlled breathing patterns" (Pert 1997 p186 - 187)

Describing her own birthing experiences, Candace Pert recalls...

"I had chosen to do it my own way when after one high tech, heavily drugged hospital delivery, and a second natural childbirth, again in the environment of a hospital (which required me to fight off a constant barrage of unnatural interventions). I decided to have my third child at home. My magic bullet had been breathing, which is a sure fire, proven strategy for releasing endorphins and quelling pain. Obviously, this is what previous generations of women, in the days before IV drips and synthetic pain medication, had relied upon. Both they and their babies must have been better off for the experience as I certainly felt myself to be." (Pert 1997 p 167)

A woman needs to feel the pain to be empowered and feel like she has achieved something.

There are many bodies of knowledge relating to the experiences of childbirth and its physical manifestations. To experience pain and be empowered by it is one approach. However our experience of speaking to calmbirth® mothers demonstrate that a woman does not have to feel pain to be empowered in childbirth. These mothers who have birthed their babies show that the techniques learned in the calmbirth® classes can be instrumental in the release of endorphins, oxytocin and other pain relieving substances in the body which result in a birthing experience that is calm, joyful and ecstatic. Some of the comments from the mothers after their labour and birth have been: "I was sad when it was over" and "I can't wait to do it again".

Sarah Buckley states that peak levels of birthing hormones can take the mother into ecstasy so that they enter motherhood awakened and transformed. (Buckley, 2003 p 262)

What has been the response from the midwives attending calmbirth® parents during their birth.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive with quite a number of midwives attending the calmbirth® practitioner training because of their experiences of having witnessed a calmbirth® mother giving birth. On the other hand if a midwife's practice and experience comes from a medical based practice, there is the possibility that she will feel the need, as the professional, to manage the labour and birth and to view it as a medical procedure. In this model, pain is seen as unacceptable and there is a strong chance that the midwife will encourage the mother to accept analgesia and or anaesthesia. calmbirth® couples are aware that pain relief is available and will request medication if needed. The calmbirth® approach primarily empowers couples to take responsibility for their birth experience in co-operation with their care givers. Relaxation, breathing and visualisation are the techniques taught to the couple to manage the sensations of labour.

calmbirth® women take too long in Second Stage.

This concept has its origin in the Active Management of Labour given to us by a group of Irish doctors in 1970s. Their belief was that every mother's labour and birth has to fit within a certain time frame. This belief was carried on and is still very much in evidence in many of the maternity hospitals throughout the western world. A number of calmbirth® mothers have reported that when labouring in the hospital birthing suite their labour was disrupted by a midwife insisting on them inappropriately "pushing" when in fact they did not feel the urge to do so.

The old and all too familiar scene is one of a pushing, panting and a fatigued mother being instructed to take a deep breath and hold it as long as possible whilst bearing down. It was expected that the mother would be working extremely hard, getting very hot and going purple in the face. It is often referred to as purple pushing.

Scientific evidence shown in the 1980's has to a certain extent been disregarded. This evidence showed that the second stage of labor is not dangerous for the baby but actually helps to stimulate the baby's digestive, eliminatory and respiratory systems. Pushing, in fact, can be dangerous to both the mother and the baby. When a woman is pushing she is holding her breath. Oxygen therefore is not going to her uterus which makes contraction more difficult and painful. It is also not going to her baby. This can lead to a drop in the baby's heart rate and fetal distress.

Of course, this isn't to say that if a woman has the urge to push, she ignore the feeling. But certainly, she shouldn't feel she has to just because she's been told that this is the way babies are born. Birth is a creative act, and like all creative acts it cannot conform to society's unnatural time constraints. The insistence that pushing is necessary in labor is simply a reflection of our cultural attitude that force and haste are superior to trust and patience. *As long as the mother and baby are monitored and all is well, both should be left to "allow" the birth to happen rather than "make" it happen.*

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Top find a registered calmbirth® practitioner in your area: **www.calmbirthregister.com.au**