

## Why is there so much fear surrounding birth?

Birth is an experience to be cherished, not feared. My aim for teaching calmbirth is to reduce the anxiety that many women feel as they approach this amazing experience.

Unfortunately, for too long, women have not been adequately educated about their body's ability to birth, or given practical techniques to help themselves to work with their body. Typically, childbirth classes have focused on labour being painful and all about the drugs that are available. This really just leaves women fearful and vulnerable.

What if women were taught that for many healthy women with normal pregnancies, birth is uncomfortable but manageable when techniques such as breathing, relaxation and creative visualisation are used?

I believe that today's Western society has forgotten what it is like to be uncomfortable! Our lifestyle is all about comfort, comfortable chairs, beds etc. Less often are women physically challenged. So when the normal, uncomfortable sensations of muscles working hard to give birth are felt, these sensations are labelled as pain. And our natural learned response to pain is to want to run away from it.

OK, I'm now imagining someone reading this who has either experienced a painful birth or heard about someone else's painful birth saying to themselves / she felt pain, not discomfort! If this is you, stop for a moment and ask yourself Did I or the person whose experience I am recalling, know any techniques such as breathing and relaxation when they gave birth? Was I/she feeling frightened? Were there other things going on that meant the labour was not progressing normally? Women certainly can experience pain in labour, I don't question that. I am suggesting that in an otherwise normal labour where the woman is not scared and when she feels supported and has techniques for helping herself, that birth can be experienced as uncomfortable but manageable.

What if you were to explore the discomfort, work with it, and acknowledge it as part of the healthy, natural process of your body opening to allow passage of your baby? Are you aware that the sensations of birthing come and go? These sensations feel a lot like what you may have experienced when you were menstruating, lower tummy ache that comes and goes. These uterine contractions, or waves as I like to call them, usually only last 1 minute when you are in established labour; And during that minute, you can break it down further 20 seconds building, 20 seconds peak, and 20 seconds returning to your normal sensations. Very much like the shape of a Wave. That means that in most cases, you have 20 seconds at the peak of the wave to work through, and if you think about it, you can probably manage 20 seconds of discomfort? Importantly, between the waves you feel as you would when you are not in labour! Did you realise that? Another amazing thing about your birthing body is that as you move further into the process, you release hormones that are your natural pain relievers.

Many women who have put quality time into practicing the calmbirth techniques are able to manage birthing their baby with little or no medications.

However, calmbirth is not necessarily about having a drug free labour. calmbirth is about reducing fear, releasing tension, feeling calmer, and coming away from the birth reflecting on it as being a good experience. As every birth is unique, this can mean different things to each family.

Absolutely there are times when the medications are recommended and required, and thank goodness they are available should they be indicated. The course will also teach you how to remain calm in unexpected or stressful circumstances should they arise.

In conclusion, in an otherwise healthy pregnancy, our mind, fear and tension get in the way of the natural process and results in more pain. When fear and tension are reduced, so is pain.

Husbands / Partners / Birth Companions, play a very important role in the process, by learning the techniques he/she is able to fully participate in the birth instead of feeling like a helpless bystander.