

T H E

P R E G N A N C Y

S P E C I A L



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Welcome



After a year on the Norwich Mumbler website, it was time to take the Pregnancy Special section down, but I didn't want to just delete all the great information from so many great local businesses, SO...I've made it into an EBook instead!

I received loads of comments from parents-to-be saying how useful they found the Pregnancy Special on the website but don't worry, all the information will still be there just on a blog post in this handy downloadable document that you can access anywhere.

It won't clutter up your coffee table, you can't lose it and you can read it on your phone in the night if your body is practising for the night feeds by keeping you awake - perfect!

I hope all the information proves useful whether you're trying for a baby or if you're expecting your first, second, third or fourth+ (!!) baby. Many knowledgeable people have contributed to it and the great thing about digital print is that it means I've been able to make lots of the text and pictures clickable links, so it's easy to find out more from a particular business.

So, pop the kettle on, or grab a cup of ice cubes to crunch, and enjoy! (Make sure you get to the end, the birth stories are always one of my favourite things to read).

Wishing you a healthy and happy pregnancy!

Katrin
(Owner, Norwich Mumbler)



HOW TO DRESS YOUR BUMP

by Jess Wilkins
Jess Wilkins Photography



Jess Wilkins Photography
maternity, baby, toddler & family

Deciding what to wear for a photoshoot can be hard enough, but deciding what to wear for a maternity shoot when none of your clothes fit you any more can be a real challenge. Luckily, getting your maternity photoshoot outfit right is easier than you think...

- * **Maxi Dresses:** When it comes to dressing for a maternity photo shoot, the maxi dress is very much your friend - maxi dresses help to draw attention to your bump while making your silhouette look slim and smooth.
- * **Block colours:** To ensure the photos don't look too busy, try to stick to block colours when selecting your outfit and avoid logos!
- * **Make it classic:** Though you're capturing a specific moment in time with a maternity photoshoot, it's a good idea to choose a classic, timeless look to ensure your images don't look too dated too quickly. Try to avoid clothes that are faddy or trendy.

I have a selection of knitted cardigans grey vest tops and white lacey tops too - simple and neutral works so well!

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME...

I'm Jess and I am a newborn, baby and maternity photographer. My welcoming studio is based at my home in Sprowston, Norfolk.

My aim is to photograph your bump, newborn or family in a fun & natural way. I like to take my time with all my clients to ensure we get those portraits you want to look back on so do not worry if your child is shy or does not sit still. I like the session to be an adventure and allow your child to get to know me first, in order to get those big natural smiles.

Being a mother of two myself, I am used to being pooped and peed on so nothing fazes me - come and put your feet up while I capture some gorgeous images. It feels great when I am chosen to be a clients newborn photographer especially when

coming to see me is often the first family outing. I believe simplicity is key and use only a handful of hats/headbands. I love the images to be about your baby and capturing their little features.

Trained in
Maternity and Newborn
Photography
Member of
The British Association
of Newborn
Photographers

SESSIONS

Maternity to capture your beautiful bump

Newborn best between 4-15 days old

Baby/toddler suitable from 4 months to walking

Child/family for those fun outdoor locations

Cake smash at the one year old session for some extra fun!



Jess Wilkins Photography
maternity, baby, toddler & family



Capturing maternity, babies, toddlers and families

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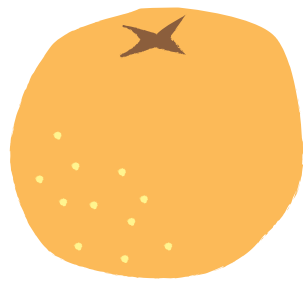


Top Tips for Pregnancy & Breastfeeding

Nutrition by Kirsty Williams Nutrition

Pregnancy is a magical time for most women as this tiny human grows and develops inside of you. Right from conception, your baby depends on you for development and survival and this doesn't stop when you give birth. The period when you are breastfeeding your baby is almost as important nutritionally as when you are carrying the baby.

Whilst this is what our bodies are designed to do, it does add an extra strain and it is important to replace and top up with nutrients that are being passed to our baby. I'm sharing my top 10 tips on keeping you healthy during pregnancy and breastfeeding.



1. Balance your blood sugar

Blood sugar balance is important at any time of life but the metabolic needs of the developing foetus place extra demands on a mother's blood sugar control as glucose transferred from maternal blood in the placenta is the main source of energy for the foetus. This means that it can be harder to balance your blood sugar during pregnancy. Protein is necessary for blood sugar balance and during pregnancy it is important to eat good quality, lean protein on a daily basis. Focus on lean sources such as chicken and fish as well as vegetarian sources, beans, pulses and eggs. Some red meat is fine too. Protein requirements increase by around 6g a day in pregnancy and it is essential for the growth and development of the baby.

2. Eat plenty of healthy fats

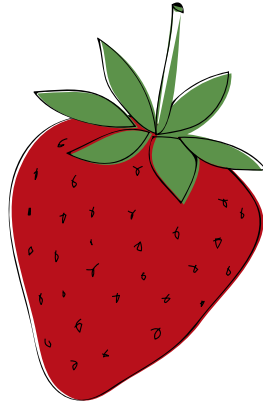
Fat can be much maligned but it is in fact very important, particularly the right kind of fat. Healthy fats help the body absorb calcium and are important for baby's development, particularly brain and eyes. They will also work on helping mum's brain function - think of that 'baby brain'! Good sources include oily fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel and anchovies, nuts and seeds, olive oil, coconut oil and avocados.

3. Vitamin D

Vitamin D is the vitamin of the moment and is such an important nutrient for all of us at every stage of life. It is essential for calcium absorption and it has been shown to have several benefits in pregnancy including lowering the risk of complications such as gestational diabetes and preeclampsia. By far the best way of absorbing vitamin D is through the skin from sun exposure. It's of course important not to burn but try to expose your skin to the sun as much as possible. It may be worth considering a supplement if you do not feel you are getting sufficient vitamin D.

4. Folic acid - the pregnancy vitamin

Folic acid remains important in pregnancy for the prevention of neural tube defects. However, evidence is emerging about the form of folic acid and it is worth bearing this in mind. Folate is the naturally occurring form of folic acid, found in foods such as brewer's yeast (Marmite), wheat germ and black-eyed peas, folic acid is the synthetic form found in supplements. Some people do not possess the gene required to metabolise folic acid properly and for this reason it is better to include folic acid in a more bioavailable form. Many good quality supplements now contain this form of folic acid, marked on labels as methylfolate or MTHFR.



5. Iron and calcium

Iron and calcium are two nutrients that are often mentioned as important during pregnancy. However, it is important to remember that intestinal absorption of iron increases from 10% to over 50% during pregnancy. Good sources of iron include red meat, green leafy veg such as spinach and pulses such as kidney beans.

The same rule applies to calcium as iron in that intestinal absorption increases during pregnancy. It is uncommon for calcium deficiency to occur in the Western world due to high levels in a typical Western diet. Good food sources are dairy but also foods such as almonds and leafy greens such as kale and collards.

6. Morning Sickness

Lots of ladies suffer with sickness during pregnancy to varying degrees. You may be sitting there thinking that it's all very well this person recommending all these healthy foods if I can't actually stomach anything! Spices such as ginger and black pepper can be helpful for nausea, also lemon or lime juice. Try chewing on some root ginger or adding it to hot water with a dash of black pepper. Lemon or lime juice works in either warm or cold water and you could add something like fresh mint or sip mint tea. The important thing is not to worry too much if you can't get food down you. It will take quite extreme circumstances for your baby not to be nourished as our bodies are designed to keep nourishing it as much as possible.

7. Milk production

Once your baby is born, the hard work and nourishment is just beginning. If you have chosen to breast feed and are struggling with milk production, there are some good foods you can include in your diet to help with milk production. Fenugreek is a spice that has been used for a long time - add to curries or even try it in a bread or scone recipe for a warm, spicy taste. Brewer's yeast is another good one, so add marmite to that toast. Fennel is also good for aiding milk production. Try fennel tea, add it raw to salads or roast it with other vegetables in the oven.



8. Balance those hormones

Ah, hormones. The wonderful ‘dance of the hormones’ that follows us through every stage of our lives. At no time is this more relevant than during pregnancy and after giving birth. Hormones can be very powerful and can either make us feel great or completely rubbish. This goes back to making sure your blood sugar is balanced and you are getting good amounts of the healthy fats.

9. Nutrient depletion

It is quite common for a woman to be and certainly feel quite depleted after giving birth. Passing all these nutrients to the baby is great but it’s important that you are replacing everything as this all puts an extra strain on your body. Ensure that you are eating a healthy balanced diet, choosing from a rainbow of fruit and vegetables every day and opting for healthy protein and fats. Aim for 8-10 portions of fruit and vegetables each day and ensure that you are drinking around 2 litres of water a day.

10. Manage stress

Pregnancy and motherhood is a wonderful and exciting time for most women but it can also be stressful. Stress affects us all and it is important to recognise the signs of too much stress and help yourself manage this. Keep in mind everything that I have already discussed as this is all important in helping your body to deal with stress. Try to take some time for yourself. This can be hard with a new baby but introduce some practical things like using the time while baby is napping. Even just fitting in 10 minutes of yoga or meditation can do wonders.

Kirsty is a Nutritional Therapist based at Treat - Norwich. If you would like more specific support for pregnancy or post-partum, contact Kirsty directly at [Kirsty Williams Nutrition](https://www.kirstywilliamsnutrition.co.uk)





How to Understand Your Maternity Notes by Midwife, Lesley Gilchrist

For many, your maternity notes can seem as if they're written in another language. To help with this I've put together a guide to understanding your maternity notes.

Parity

You'll see this often written as a number, i.e., 1, 2, 3 etc. This relates to the number of times that you have given birth. Therefore, if you already have one child your parity would be 1, if you gave birth to twins and therefore now have two children your parity would be 2.

Presentation

This means what part of your baby is in your pelvis (or just above) and therefore is 'presenting'. You may see this written as 'ceph' or 'cephalic' and this simply means that the head is presenting (this is the most common). Another variation is 'breech' which means that your baby is coming bottom first.

Engagement

You'll see this written as 0/5, 1/5, 2/5, 3/5, 4/5, 5/5 or free. This is where your baby's bottom or head is in relation to your pelvis. If your baby is head down, when your midwife or doctor feels low down on your tummy they're feeling for how much of your baby's head that they can still feel. For example, if they've written 3/5 It means that they can feel three fifths of your baby's head in your tummy with the rest being in your pelvis. The lower the first number the lower your baby's head or bottom is in your pelvis; usually 3/5 and lower would indicate that your baby has 'engaged' (but not always)

SFH

This stands for 'symphyseal, fundal height'. This relates to the distance between the symphysis (the very front part of the pelvis) and the fundus (the top part of your uterus). This will normally be measured with a tape measure and written in centimetres. Most midwives nowadays use customised growth charts and the measurement will be plotted onto this chart. It's important to note that this measurement does not measure baby, rather their 'house' so it will take into account your tummy and their fluid. It does however help us to pick up problems with baby's growth.



B/P or Blood Pressure

Your blood pressure will be checked at each appointment. Everyone’s blood pressure is different, what they will be looking for is a trend of rising blood pressure over the course of your pregnancy. If your blood pressure does begin to rise you may be asked to attend hospital to have blood tests to rule out certain conditions. You may also be started on blood pressure lowering medication

Urine

Your urine will be tested for many different things. The most common are urine, or water infections, and for this a sample of your urine will be sent to the laboratory for testing. Protein is also tested for, which can also be an indication of a urine infection, normal pregnancy discharge, or less commonly, pre-eclampsia.

If you have any questions about your notes, just ask your midwife or doctor to explain them to you.

Guest blog by Lesley Gilchrist. Lesley is a mum of two, a registered & practising midwife with experience of private and NHS provision, media midwifery expert and ‘One Born Every Minute’ TV personality. Together with friend and business partner Claire Charlton has created a brand new product range called “My Expert Midwife” .



“From irritated, stretched skin, cracked nipples, vaginal swelling, perineal tears to episiotomies, the My Expert Midwife no-nonsense collection provides a highly-effective solution for women experiencing the physical side-effects of pregnancy, childbirth and beyond. The range is specially formulated and tested to soothe, calm, prevent infection and aid healing, providing women with the safest ingredients necessary to restore body confidence.”



Exercise in Pregnancy

by Hanna Dabbour

What do I need to know about exercise when pregnant?

Firstly, there is no reason to cease exercising when you are pregnant. In fact, maintaining your strength and fitness will help you with the birth and allow you to get back to normal quicker as well as allowing for an easier pregnancy.

But, there are some things you need to consider:

In the first two trimesters, focus on exercises you have done before - when you are pregnant is not the time to start to train for your first marathon or take up high-intensity training. The reason for this is that in these trimesters, particularly the first, heavy fatigue is common and due to progressing laxity of your muscles and ligaments, you are more likely to hurt yourself. But if you stick to what you have done before and what you know well, there is no reason for you to not continue - just remember to allow some leeway for your situation.

If you are new to training, or in the third trimester, I would recommend swimming, Yoga or Pilates - the first is gentle on the body but provides a good workout, while the latter both focus on body-weight exercises and can be as gentle as you need them to be. Light-gym work is also a good option as you can easily adjust effort level and the exercises you do.

In terms of exercises to avoid; anything that requires you to lie flat for longer periods or puts direct pressure on your stomach, or exercises that put strain on your core muscles directly. This includes crunches of all forms, the plank and similar static core exercises. If you go to a Yoga or Pilates class, be sure the instructor is aware and have been trained in pregnancy Yoga or Pilates and they should easily be able to adjust the class.



How important are pelvic floor exercises?

In one sentence - you should be doing them now and for the rest of your life.

When you talk about pelvic floor exercises you are actually talking about pelvic rehabilitation, which is a particular skill of Physiotherapists that focus on dysfunctions of the pelvic floor and the pelvic floor muscles.

The reason you hear so much about the exercises is that pelvic dysfunction is a very common in women of all ages, and particularly after giving birth. In short, the pelvic floor - with its associated muscles, tissues and ligaments - provides a 'platform' for your bladder, uterus and rectum. If it is weak or damaged, it can cause pain, altered sensations or be unable to undertake its main job of supporting the region and controlling the openings of your urethra, vagina and anus.

The main cause of pelvic floor dysfunction is childbirth, surgery, obesity or weakness through ageing. This is one of the reasons we have to keep doing the exercises, as to reduce the strength reduction that happens when you get older.

But, during childbirth in particular, the muscles can tear, be cut during delivery (such as when forceps is used or during an episiotomy), and lose strength generally from exhaustion or simply become lax. A dysfunctional pelvic floor can lead to a number of problems and make you unable to enjoy the same activities you did previously - many struggle to continue to run, jump or do other high impact exercises such as aerobics, weight lifting as well as any number of sports that mimic problematic movements.

But, don't be alarmed. With some work, you can be back to normal soon enough, and if you need help, well that is why there are Women's Health Physiotherapists.

So, this is where pelvic floor exercises come in, both before and after birth as it forms a crucial part of pelvic floor rehabilitation and it usually the first and last step towards a return to normality. The aim of the exercises is simply to return your pelvic floor to its previous strength as well as help to treat or minimise any other problem.



Some tips:

After birth, begin as soon as you feel comfortable. Early on you may not feel very much or the muscles may be very weak. Keep doing the exercises!

I recommend to do them every time you feed your baby - do them until you can't feel anything anymore. Expect to see improvement in 6-8 weeks but it may take 6 months or more of diligent exercising until you return to full strength.

If you haven't had a baby, or you have returned to full strength postnatally, try to do the exercises once a day. There is no need to do more - if you do it too much you may end up with an overactive pelvic floor which can cause pain!

If you are unsure of how strong your pelvic floor is, don't be afraid to ask your GP for a referral to a Women's Health Physiotherapist and they can check it for you. If you have any symptoms, such as heaviness, leakage you should also see a physio as they can help you.

A physiotherapist can also advise you in terms of when you can return to regular exercise and other high impact activities.

What is a pelvic floor app?

There is an increasing trend around apps and gadgets - more and more are hitting the market every day. In the past few years, a number of mobile apps have appeared to help you exercise your pelvic floor. Typically they give you regular alerts as to do them, and provide you with detailed instructions of how to do the exercises correctly. Some also provide other exercises that can be done while exercising your PFMs.

Overall, compliance with exercises over time is greatly linked to improving your pelvic floor, so it is hard to oversell anything that assists with this as well as helping to ensure you do them well. In the UK, the NHS app (Squeezy) and the TENA app (My Pelvic Floor Fitness) are the most common apps for this purpose, although many other countries have followed suit and released their own apps.



DabbourPhysio is a Norwich-based Physiotherapy Clinic specialising in Women's Health and Musculoskeletal problems, rehabilitation Yoga and Pilates classes as well as Hypnobirthing and Antenatal workshops.

The current Yoga/Pilates Pregnancy and Postnatal classes run on Tuesday afternoons. The Physiotherapy rehabilitation classes, YogaPhysio and PhysioPilates, are on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

DabbourPhysio also offer the Healthy Mummy Assessment, a postnatal check-up that can help reduce the risk of having problems later in life as a result of giving birth.



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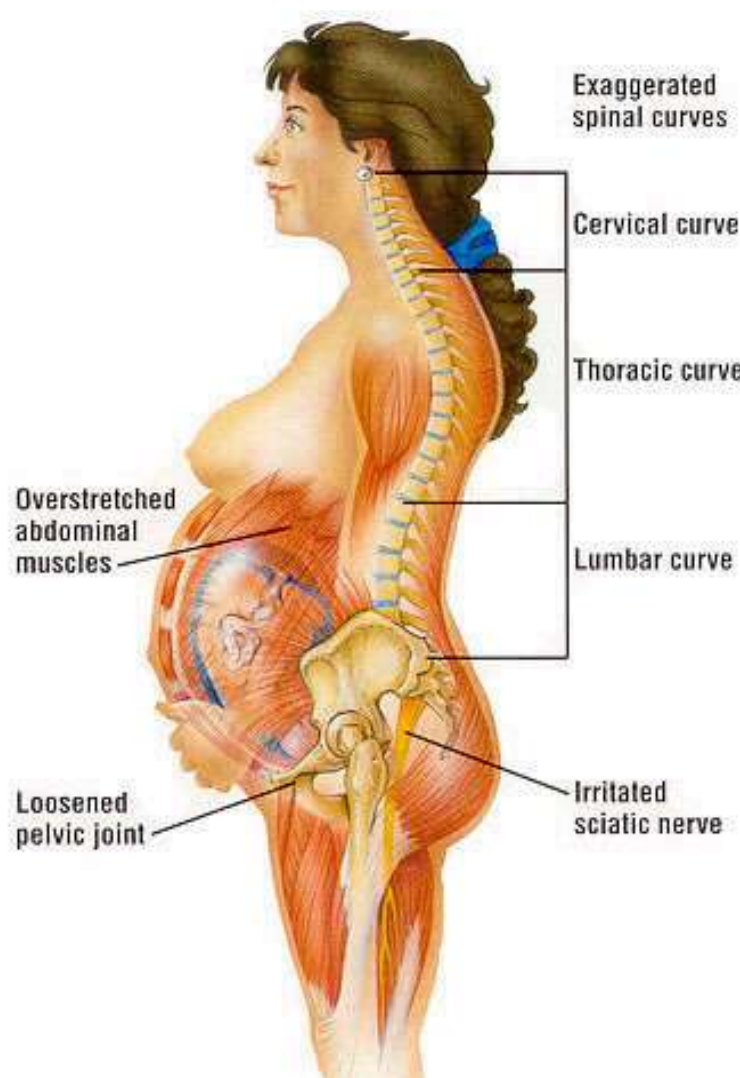
Back Pain in Pregnancy

by Rosie Taylor

Lower back pain, pelvic girdle dysfunction (PGD) and upper back pain are common in pregnancy. They happen for a number of reasons, but the good news is that physiotherapy for pregnancy, Pregnancy Yoga and pilates exercises can help a lot.

Back pain in the lumbar spine happens when the weight of the baby draws the pelvis into an anteriorly tilted (forward) position. This means the joints in the lower back are compressed and muscles have to work extra hard to keep you standing. At the same time, abdominal muscles are being stretched as baby grows, reducing support for the lower back. This can irritate discs and affect leg nerves causing leg and groin pain.

Pain in one side of the pelvis at the sacroiliac joint (SIJ) is common. Often this is caused by the changing load and decreased stability in the pelvis.



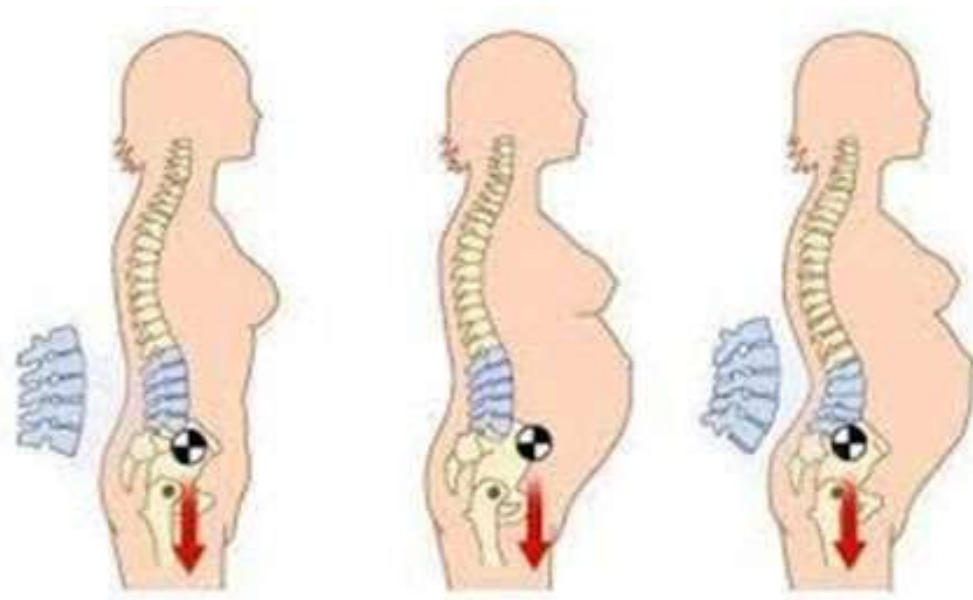
In pregnancy, a hormone called Relaxin is released that causes your ligaments to soften, allowing baby to pass through the pelvis during birth. A side effect is that the pelvis becomes more unstable and can cause catching or movement at the sacroiliac joint. The same changes can also cause pain at the Symphysis Pubis (the front of the pelvis).

The release of Relaxin affects more than the pelvic ligament. You may find your balance isn't quite as good as it used to be and that you have developed wobbly knees and ankles - so watch your step!

As baby bumps grow, posture adapts and alters the body's centre of gravity. This can affect the way the body moves and can make the upper back curve forward and become stiff.

Stress can also contribute to these bodily pains, so, if things are emotionally draining, back pain can increase.

The good news, there are ways of alleviating these aches and pains.



Tips to relieve back pain Posture

Be aware of posture! Slouching strains the spine, so whether sitting, or standing, think about tucking your tailbone under a little, drawing in lower abdominal muscle and rolling your shoulder blades down your back to lengthen the spine. Pelvic tilting exercises are also a must in pregnancy, and can be done by softening your knee's and tucking your tail bone under or sitting on a gym ball, you can also use an out breath to engage the pelvic floor muscles at the same time as tucking under.

Secondly, try sitting on a gym ball. The weight of the baby will be distributed through the ball putting less load on the lower back. You can also use the gym ball for pelvic tilting.

Pelvic stability exercises specific to pregnancy can help, particularly Pilates type exercises which can also help you keep your pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles (the ones that support your back) strong.

Finally, invest in a good pregnancy pillow which you can put between your legs and under your bump when sleeping.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy can often bring instant relief from back pain in pregnancy. Treatment may consist of gentle joint mobilisation, massage, kinesiotaping (to help support bump), posture education and prescribed Pilates or yoga type exercises. Physiotherapists can also use acupuncture to help relieve back pain in pregnancy and can prescribe maternity belts that can help lessen the load on your pelvis.

General Exercise

Keep as active as you feel you can. Don't suddenly start training for a triathlon, but if you were active before your pregnancy, keep going as long as it feels comfortable.

As you progress through your pregnancy try pregnancy specific yoga and/or Pilates. These classes target the areas of the body affected by your changing body. You will also learn breathing exercises which can help you relax, connect with your baby and help during labour.

Swimming can be a great non-weight bearing exercise (but watch you're not arching you're your back too much), and you might not even feel pregnant when in the water! If you like the gym try a stationary bike or cross trainer, and, if nothing else, make sure you do some walking every day.

If you are in pain, do see a physiotherapist we'll likely be able to help you relieve some of that discomfort as well as help keep you fit and prepare you for labour.

Wellfit Mumma is run by Senior Physiotherapist Rosie Taylor. She offers pregnancy physiotherapy, pregnancy yoga and mother and baby yoga at Treat clinic .





10 ways to enjoy a Caesarean

by Jackie Heffer-Cooke

Teaching around 60 local Norfolk pregnant women a week ‘YogaBumps’ pregnancy yoga and ‘The Birthing Tool Kit’ at ‘The Orange Grove Clinic’, I come across women for whom, for one reason or another, giving birth naturally is not an option. Sometimes they are quite excited about the baby exiting through the sun roof J and why not! But sometimes they are disappointed as they feel any control or even ‘fun’ is taken out of the birth. I get this.

My first baby Megan, born nearly 11 years ago now, was breach. I remember feeling sad that (from the advice I was getting) a natural birth experience was now no longer an option. And although I was scared of giving birth (that was before I learnt any birthing tools...) I wanted Meg’s birth to be an experience, a day to remember. Not a day about an operation and a hospital stay. Plus I felt saddened that I would be separated from my partner on our first night as a three.

Whilst I was considering if I had any options, such as a manual turn, or some moxibustion, Meg decided she didn’t want to wait for me to make up my mind, and she sprang into action at 36 weeks, deciding to surprise all of us and come early. (She is still full of beans and happy to surprise!)

The birth was odd. Mostly because as soon as I entered the hospital I was being prepped for an operation, rather than full labour and birth. And this labour therefore felt like an ‘unlabour’. I had to wait in my operation gown, in ‘unlabour labour’, for four hours in a hospital room, and was then wheeled down into theatre whilst puffing and panting, feeling terrified of what was to come and a lonely night without my James to support, on this, one of the biggest nights of my life.



Next time around, four years later, I went for the VBAC, vaginal birth after caesarean (sexy title) but this time I was fully prepared with HypnoBirthing, active birth moves, and a hospital bag full of preparation... just in case... (this is why I now teach The Birthing Tool Kit - it works!)

I had an amazing birth with Sam. I rode my birth good. I breathed into my belly, I made some amazing sounds, and loved every ounce of empowering moment of it. Then, near the end, I started bleeding. So much so the obstetrician decided it was too big a gamble and whisked me off for another caesarean. And that was that. However, this time around I didn’t care as I had 10 hours of an amazing birth experience, and, unlike the first time, I felt I had done brilliantly - I just needed some help to make us both safe at the end.

So, here are my own personal top tips to making your caesarean more doable, whether or not it is planned or unplanned:

Do some deep relaxation, self-hypnosis mind mapping preparation before the birth. When deeply relaxed, imagine yourself as you leave the house, the journey to the hospital, the walk into the hospital, the feeling of getting prepped and ready for the birth, the look of the lights above your head, the chat of the surgeons around you, the moment you meet your baby. Imagine a short stay at the hospital on the ward, then focus on getting back home and carrying your special bundle safe and sound back into your house. If you imagine it, in detail, over and over, the mind will become satisfied with the process and you will be a lot less anxious on the day. I can help you with this at a Hypnotherapy session.

Take some music to play in the theatre during the birth of your baby. This is your birth, your baby. Don't feel like you are being awkward, or that the surgeons and theatre staff won't like it - they will! It will make your birth special for you and even memorable in a day's work for them!

Tune into your breath, it will help you stay focused, calm, in control, and you will even enjoy this experience of birthing your baby - however it happens!

Ask to have your baby given straight to you. You will be able to have **Your Moment**, regardless of whether your baby comes out normally or through the lid!



In the recovery room, you can gaze at your lovely new baby for as long as you like, and have skin-to-skin when breast feeding. Just unwrap your baby, and wrap both of you up to keep warm!

Be cheeky - if you don't ask you don't get. If you want a private room, ask for one, you never know, if they are not busy, they may! At least ask if there is a bay in the ward with a window. If you don't ask, you don't get... Once on the ward, make your area your own. I asked my 4 year old to draw some pics which I blue-tacked up on the walls around me - big happy rainbows and sunshine! Plus take your own pillow!

If you don't want to talk to anyone - close your curtain. I am super sociable, but I didn't want to talk to anyone except my baby and my husband whilst on the ward, just pretending this was my own space. Own it. It is yours for as long as you are there.

Relax. The more relaxed you are with your baby, the more your will heal, the quicker you heal the quicker you will get home! Simple.

You will get home! And then it is time to sink into your baby bubble just the same as everyone else, for just as long as you need. Bliss. Plus, you get to lie in bed for at least a week simply gazing at this amazing human that you have made!!

Also, you should be aware that you can discuss the possibility of a natural caesarean, a calmer way to have a caesarean where a small incision is made, the baby’s head is helped out by the surgeon, and the baby moves out all on its own (sometimes taking up to around 4 minutes). Research says the birth is calmer for you and the baby and you get to have skin to skin and leave the cord until the pulsation has ceased. If it had of been available this would have been a good option, although of course not available in an emergency situation.

Ultimately, be proud you birthed you baby, however it came. If you needed some help, it doesn’t matter, just as long as the two of you are safe. Just put some love into the prep, and you will have an experience to remember. Enjoy!



Jackie Heffer-Cooke is a Norfolk childbirth educator and teacher of The Birthing Tool Kit and YogaBumps pregnancy yoga.





Top 11 Essential Kit for Labour

Mum of two and co-founder of “My Expert Midwife” Lesley Gilchrist shares her top 11 essential kit for labour.

1. Drinks - You probably won't want to eat anything in labour, and even if you did your body won't be able to efficiently get the nutrients it needs. In labour your body just needs glucose; coconut water, energy drinks such as lucozade sport (not carbonated) are all excellent sources. Aim to drink regularly and mix the sugary drinks with water. Try freezing small bottles of water and removing them from your freezer as you're leaving for hospital, that way you'll have a ready supply of cool water.
2. Food - You really won't want to eat. Imagine marathon running and eat what they eat during a race. Glucose tablets and glucose gel packs are excellent. If you really do feel like eating something keep it easily digestible; crackers, fruit etc.
3. Flip Flops - This will protect your feet from communal areas within the hospital and also allow swollen feet the ability to cool.
4. Comfy Clothes - Some women prefer to wear nothing and others just a big baggy shirt or t-shirt. Give some thought to how you'll feel in labour and what you'll be most comfortable in.
5. Your Own Pillow - Many hospitals lack comfy pillows and also have a limited supply of them. If you do feel that you would benefit from having your own pillow with you just remember that it may become soiled during labour and birth.
6. Headphones & Music - This is self-explanatory but give some thought to your play list ahead of time.
7. Partner's Picnic - Many hospitals don't offer facilities for meals out with normal office hours. AS you can't predict when your labour will start it's a good idea to pack a bag for your birth partner to ensure that they are kept well fed and hydrated. Sandwiches can be pre-frozen and removed at the same time as the water.
8. TENS machine - This is an excellent form of pain relief. You may already be using this during transfer to hospital but you will need to order this in advance (usually by 36 weeks of pregnancy)



9. Spritz for Bits - A cooling and soothing blend of lavender, tea tree oil and witch hazel. Perfect to help sooth post childbirth swelling in your vagina and also feet and legs.
10. Wheat Pack for Back Pain Relief - Most hospitals offer facilities to heat these for you in a microwave, some don't though so it's worth checking with your local hospital first
11. Lavender Oil - An excellent essential oil to relax you and ease muscle tension; great for pain relief too. Add a few drops to a tissue and seal in a plastic sandwich bag (or similar). This allows you to take deep breaths of lavender oil when needed and won't have a sleepy effect on others in the room. Alternative you can use My Expert Midwife's 'fantastic skin elastic' contains lavender oil, for massage in labour.

The most honest, straight-talking pre-and-post-natal product range has arrived for mums-to-be and new mums. My Expert Midwife - developed by midwife and mum duo Lesley and Claire - is a no-nonsense collection designed to tackle taboos around pregnancy and childbirth.

The four products - Spritz for Bits, No Harm Nipple Balm, Fantastic Skin Elastic and Peri Prep Your Bits - have been designed to provide a highly-effective solution to the physical side effects of pregnancy, birth and motherhood. From irritated, stretching skin and sore, cracked nipples to vaginal swelling, perineal tears and episiotomies, the My Expert Midwife range is specially formulated to soothe, calm, prevent infection and aid healing, providing women with the safest ingredients necessary to restore body confidence. Plus, each product comes complete with its own individually designed dispenser system to ensure no-fuss, no spill and easy application.

The My Expert Midwife range is available to purchase online at [My Expert Midwife](#).





How to have a Positive Birth Experience

by Midwife Molly O'Brien

Giving birth is:

Awesome!

Fantastic!

Amazing!

Transforming!

What do you feel when you read these words?

It wouldn't surprise me to hear you say “ I don't believe it” “Hmmm...I'm not so sure about that” or “That's not what I've heard!”

Negative, scary and at times, downright terrifying stories abound, and can be difficult to avoid. If you watch television, use the internet, read magazines or speak to family and friends, you may well hear tales that cause your heart to beat faster or your stomach churn. Some of these stories are based on real life but many more “grow with the telling”.

There is good news - you can have a positive, empowered birth! I have witnessed hundreds of amazingly beautiful births, two of my own births were comfortable and the last was pain free.

In my work as a practising midwife and reading research and evidence, I have discovered there are 3 major reasons for birth becoming difficult and at times traumatic:

Fear,

Position of the baby. Have a look at this video Katrin and I made for Norwich Mumblers [HERE](#)

Medicalisation of childbirth.

This blog will focus on the impact of fear - and how it can be managed.

If we think about birth logically, why should it feel excruciating and traumatic? Birth is like any other physiological process and just as the gut digests food without pain or the heart pumps blood without conscious effort on your part, birth happens all by itself.

Your body has everything it needs to grow and give birth to your baby.

There is an exquisite orchestration of hormones working for you. Oxytocin, sometimes known as the love hormone brings your womb the power it needs to give birth and helps you bond with your baby and endorphins are your body's natural painkillers. Oxytocin is a 'shy' hormone and requires the right environment to do its job. These hormones are produced in the primitive part of your brain but can be disrupted by a number of factors, for example, bright lights, lack of privacy and fear.

When we are frightened our bodies produce a hormone called adrenaline. This is very helpful if we are faced with danger. It is known as the flight or fight reflex. Adrenaline redirects blood from non essential muscles and organs so our bodies can be ready for action, either running away or fighting the danger. Extra blood and oxygen to our limbs, heart and lungs will help us run fast.

When this reflex is triggered in labour, tension from fear and reduced blood flow to the womb can result in a more painful experience. Adrenaline affects the production of oxytocin and can cause labour to stop or falter.. A common example of this disruption is when a woman reports good labour surges at home but when she leaves her safe and comfortable home environment to travel to hospital those surges can disappear or reduce in intensity. The surges will return eventually but it can take an hour or so.



For many years in my practice I used gentle soothing techniques to help labouring women relax- it was an instinctive reaction. Eventually evidence of the importance of oxytocin, its role in the process of childbirth and the way stress can stop or reduce its production started to appear in research. Recognising that my instinctive practice had a sound physiological basis led me to train as a Hypnobirthing practitioner. Hypnobirthing helps women manage fear and anxiety, giving the body's normal birth physiology a far better chance to take progress.

Attending Hypnobirthing classes provides you and your birth partner the tools and strategies to help you stay and remain relaxed, confident and calm throughout labour, no matter where or how you give birth.

If you are interested in finding out more about Hypnobirthing, or my “moving for an easier birth” classes you can contact me via Treat or my pages on the Treat website Hypnobirthing and “Parent Information and Birth Preparation (PIP)” Classes. I also run a monthly free 90 minute antenatal class at Treat in Norwich. This class provides an opportunity to discuss birth preparation and explore any issues that need clarification.



Midwife, antenatal educator and hypnobirthing practitioner, Molly has practised as a midwife for 20 years in both hospital and community settings, attending hundreds of women in labour.

Molly is also an associate lecturer at the University of East Anglia (UEA). Her area of expertise is physiological birth, hypnobirth and waterbirth, but she also has a wealth of experience in complex birth. Molly is an expert in normal, straightforward birth, and how to keep it that way.



Daddyng It - How to be a top notch birthing partner

So she's pregnant. Now what?!

You have a few months to start preparing for the arrival of your tiny human so take a deep breath and take it slow. Let yourself acclimatise to this new promotion to fatherhood, you're going to be amazing.

You may not be physically growing your child but you still have a vital role in pregnancy and birth.

So what can you do?

Firstly I'm going to qualify all of this with a bit of science. So we all have hormones surging round our bodies but OXYTOCIN is a magic juice for women. It was present in her body when you made your baby and it's the hormone that powers through labour and birth making the muscles of the uterus work with masterful efficiency. It also has huge role to play in her daily life with her deep connections and stress management.

When you show her love, when she feels a rush of connection with you, oxytocin is present in her body making her feel great and creating superb bonds between you both as you enter a new phase of your life. A SUPER bonus is that oxytocin crosses the placenta wall and into your baby resulting in a happy, calm and emotionally nourished baby.

Leading up to birthing day...

Reading and researching

A good bit of filling your brain with useful pregnancy, birth and parenting information will fill you with confidence. When you start researching a topic, you'll begin to discover the answer to questions you never realised you had. As you understand about what is happening to her body and your baby, your relationship with the process will deepen and you'll have a wealth of knowledge to call upon as you go through the journey of pregnancy and birth together.

Be warned though, there's a lot of frankly patronising and sexist material out there aimed at fathers-to-be, so try before you buy!

Listening

It's no secret that women like to chat. But it actually goes beyond that. Talking things through is how women manage their anxiety and this is intrinsically linked to the hormone responses in their bodies. The aim of the game is to keep those delicious oxytocin levels up and just sitting, listening to her is a super easy and effective way that you can do this. The testosterone in you will activate your desire to 'fix it'. Resist the urge to fix anything. Just listen, make the right noises and validate her feelings. Her brain will be awash with oxytocin and you'll gain great insight into her fears, desires and wishes for labour and birth.

Planning

Chat with your partner about the kind of birthing experience you both want. Use your new found knowledge of her feelings and the birthing process to formulate some birth preferences that are right for all of you.

Touch and massage

Whilst we have always known this, recent research has proven that human touch is a natural pain relief. And because of your relationship with your partner, your very touch will create a hormonal response in her. Endorphins (the body's natural pain relief) and oxytocin will fill her body and cross over into baby. She'll feel calmer, happier, supported and safe. Hugging her regularly throughout will make her feel great and deepen your relationship. Caressing her bump is a great way for you to bond with your unborn baby...you may even get some kicks in response (from baby, not her!). Light massage has an even greater positive effect.

Preparation

Whenever possible, go to midwife, hospital or consultant appointments as well as scans. I also recommend attending antenatal preparation classes together. Courses like hypnobirthing will teach you a lot about how to become the ultimate birthing team. Another great course is Birthing4Blokes, an online preparation course written specifically for men by a male midwife (it's fab!).



During labour and birth

As her oxytocin levels increase in labour, your testosterone levels will do so also leading to an increased need to 'do something'. Here are some active ways to support your partner.

Keeper of the birth zone

It's your very important role to ensure that the birthing environment is safe and nurturing. You will have chatted about how she wants the space to be: maybe dimmed lights, comfort, people in the room etc.

Take care of yourself

In order to care for your partner, you need to care for yourself. To maintain your energy eat, drink and take some breaks...don't forget to pack your own snack filled hospital bag too :).

Take care of her

Prompt her to eat and drink to keep her energy up and remind her to have a wee every now and then.

Oxytocin booster

Your voice, your touch, your smell, are all reminders of safety, home, passion, comfort. Your nurturing presence and attentiveness will help keep her calm and maintain her oxytocin levels. Breathe with her, sway with her, hold her and tell her how amazing she is.

But your most vital role, is being the expert on her. You are the only one in the room that knows her thoughts, who can read her cues and who knows what you both want for you and your baby. Trust yourself and your instincts.

Your tiny human is here

Ensure that your partner remains safe and nurtured during that first hour of motherhood (aptly named ‘the Golden Hour’) so that she can continue to ride her oxytocin high for as long as possible.

Just ‘be’ in this moment. Hold fire with those announcement texts, tweets, emails, facebook status’, snapchats, telegrams etc.

Your baby knows you already but deepen that bond further by whipping off your shirt for some newborn skin to skin cuddles.

There are lots of wonderful things that come out of your involvement in the birthing process. But most powerfully, you are giving your family the very best start.

Your new little team.



Siobhán is owner of ‘Your Tiny Human’

Email: info@yourtinyhuman.com

“I’m a mama, Doula and Wise Hippo hypnobirthing instructor. As a doula, I provide unconditional and continual emotional support to families whilst also acting as a source of unbiased information so that they can make the right choices for their birth. I will be by their side, in complete harmony with mama and birth partner.

As a Wise Hippo instructor, I teach women and their birth partners (mega team) a load of science, tools and techniques for a confident, positive birthing experience so that they can own their birth no matter what route it takes. I run group and private courses around Norwich.”





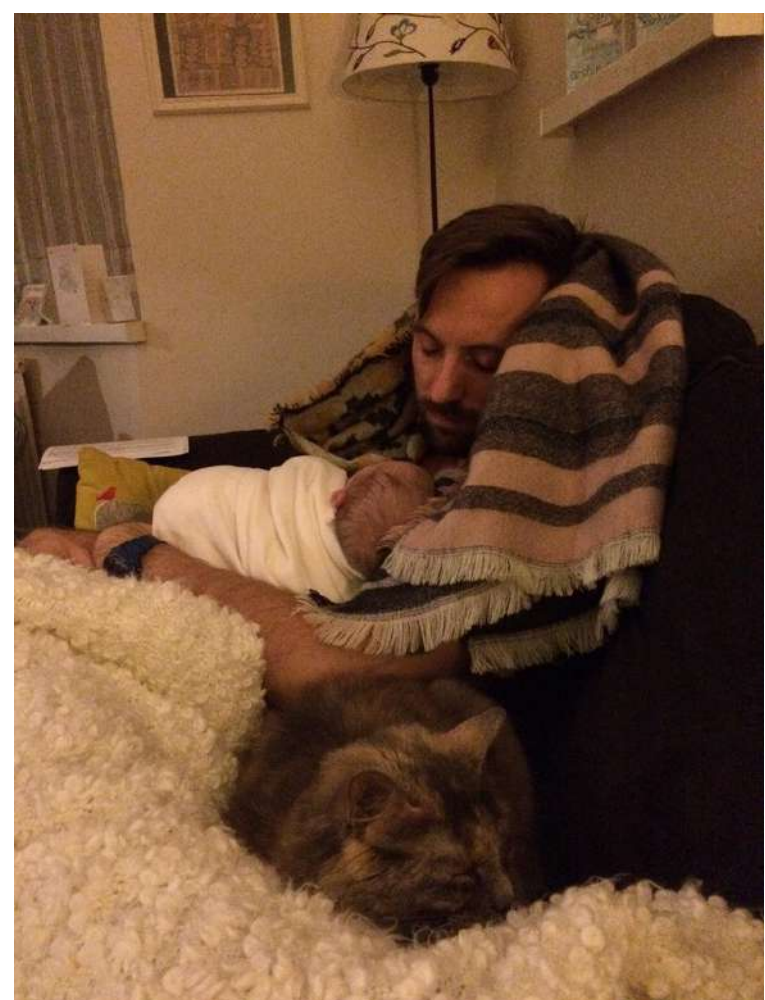
Pregnancy & Labour: A Dad's Perspective

It struck me pretty early on - this could be the most powerless I've ever felt. Not in a way to match life's more mundane circumstances, like skidding in a car or waiting to hear how a job interview went. This was life or death.

Sure, that sounds dramatic. And it is, quite rightly. There is nothing about pregnancy or labour that isn't dramatic. Even the quiet bits. They're just pauses... for effect. The emotions, sensations, fears and euphoria that rushed through my head from the moment we knew it was going to happen, to when the lightning bolt of reality struck - there is no way I could compare them to what my wife experienced. But I can compare them to everything I experienced in the previous 35 years of my life, and there really was nothing like it. That comes with hindsight. The pregnancy felt like sparring between normal life and the prospect of a little person to look after: six words that flowed off the tongue, yet were like hanging a blank canvass and calling it a painting.

I'm not sure I could tell you how we picked the courses we took in during my wife's pregnancy. I know we talked it through and made the decisions together. I know we wanted to prepare as best we could. But you soon get used to feeling that you're not entirely sure what you're getting yourself into, which was why every one of our Norwich Expectancy classes was so important to me. Together we took in so much basic and objective information that empowered us both: my wife in what to anticipate, and me in what role I could play to help her. At the very least, not hinder.

Then there was Hypnobirthing: the epitome of pregnancy unknown - and relaxation classes that came with the side benefit of helping my London Marathan debut and general wellbeing. I'd never felt so relaxed! I didn't miss a midwife appointment or scan - not out of duty, but because I didn't want to miss a beat. I didn't want to be powerless. Therefore, knowledge was power. Being in classes certainly made an impression on us. My wife joined plenty of them once our little boy arrived, and she now runs her own Tiny Talk baby signing sessions in Thorpe St Andrew, Drayton and Poringland.



The point was from expectancy to Hypnobirthing, from a recognisance visit to the Midwife-Led Birthing Unit at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital to putting together our birthing plan, we were preparing together - for the labour to come, but just as much for our roles in dealing with it. Of course, I really mean my role in dealing with it. My wife was going to play the same roles as every expectant mother in labour.

For a male involved, there’s much more wiggle room - and I get that. What I felt and what I wanted to do wouldn’t be for everyone; I have no idea how many would feel the same. But I know when it came to being calm, to coaching her breathing, to following our plan, to offering support, to reassuring when needed and not hindering her progress, that our preparation time together - along with natural fortune I’ll always be grateful for - helped us deliver the most beautiful boy and privileged job we could ever wish to take on.



My wife was the star. She did all the work, took all the pain and all the risk; and in truth, I could have felt powerless. But in reality, all I felt was part of her experience - as well as such a proud husband. And daddy.

Michael Bailey is a sports journalist for the EDP

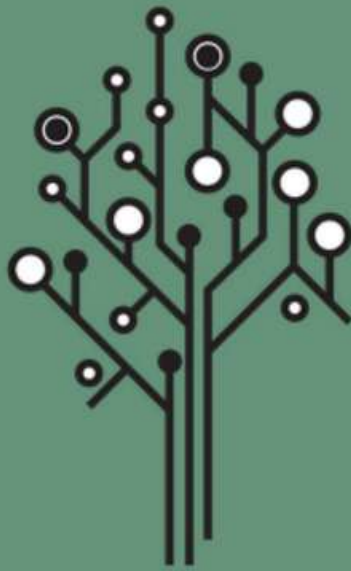




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Mumbler Birth Stories

Cein's Birth Story



It all began whilst walking my hyperactive rescue dog, Annie.

I was 38+2, and was convinced my little man would be late. I had had a rough pregnancy, with hypermesis the entire time, PGP and Bell's palsy, so of course thought my suffering would last forever!

Whilst bending down to pick up my dogs tennis ball, I felt a tiny bit of fluid come out. "Oh no! I've just peed myself!" I thought in a panic. Went home and changed and didn't think anymore of it. Until it happened again! Adamant that I wasn't peeing myself, I called the midwives at about 11am. I booked myself in for a test at the MLBU at 10pm to see if it was my waters breaking!

My husband was away with work, and didn't want to worry him so didn't bother to let him know incase it was a false alarm, as he was a 3 hour drive away.

However, whilst watching Winterwatch (I'm such a nerd, but I love it!) I started to lose my mucus plug. So at 8pm I had to phone my husband and let him know that the baby is going to make an early appearance!

My husband got home just before I had to leave to go to the hospital to check if my waters had broken. Got to the hospital at 10pm and right enough, my water had broken. I wasn't really getting any contractions at all, so I was booked in for an induction at 11am the next day.

Upon getting home at 12am I decided to go for a bath as I felt totally gross! Husband went to go get some sleep and left me to it.

Then all of a sudden my body was pushing. It came out of nowhere! I couldn't stop myself! I shouted out that I was pushing and to call the midwives, and my poor husband got in to such a panic! The midwives sent an ambulance to our house as I could barely move as the contractions were every 2 minutes and so all consuming. My husband dried and dressed me, then we waited by the front door for the ambulance. It felt like a life time! I was so convinced I was going to give birth to my baby inside my pyjamas! I remember so vividly on my hands and knees on the stairs in the hall, and looking over to my poor dog who is nervous anyway. She was so petrified and her eyes were like saucers. I felt so guilty that she had to see me like this and had no idea why! Finally the ambulance showed up, my husband wasn't allowed in with me so he had to drive himself to the hospital. I was given gas and air, but it made me feel so sick that I refused any more.

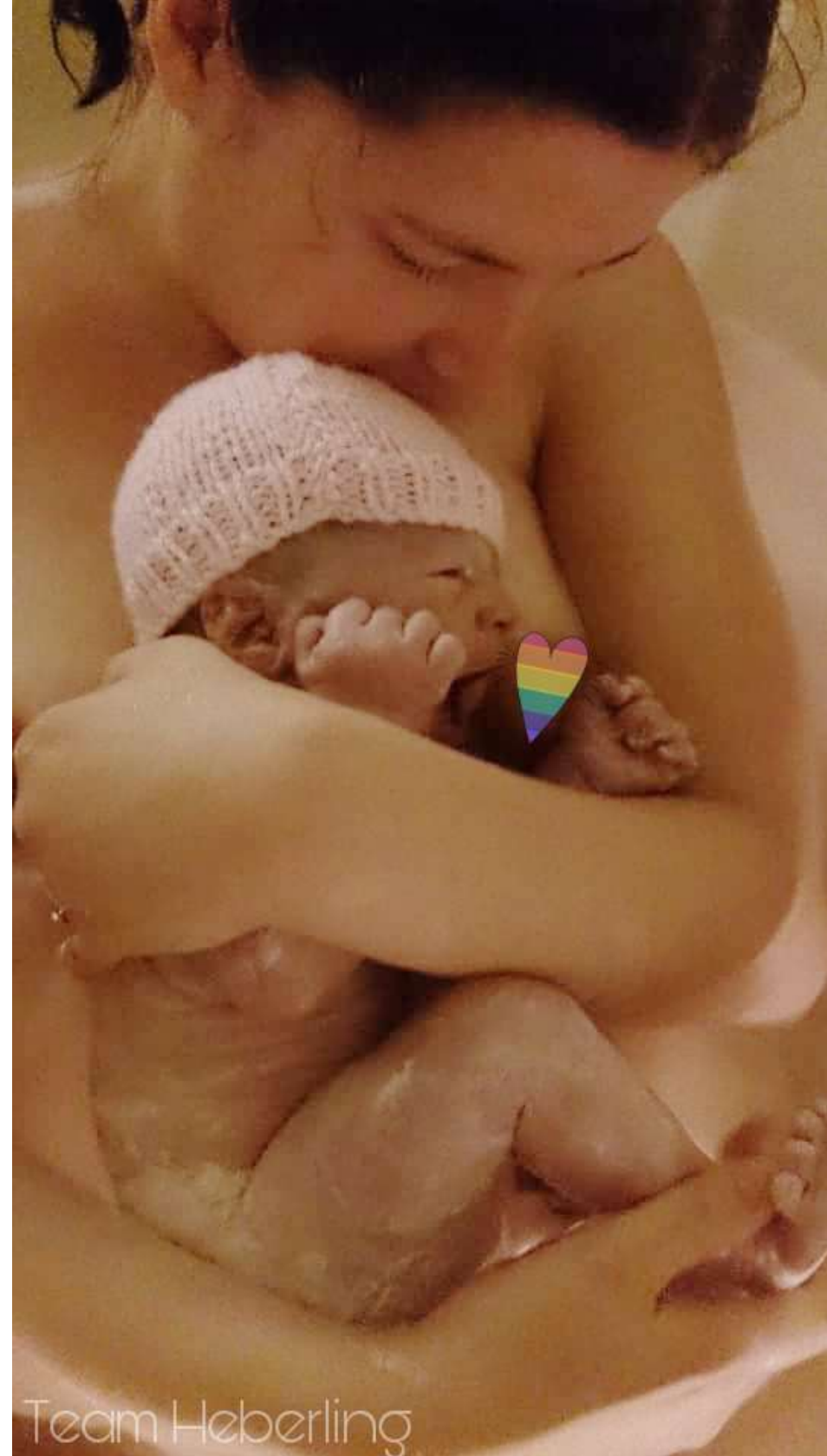
I got to the MLBU and I remember asking for my music to be put on; the only thing I wanted in my birth plan was for my son to be born to my music. Didn't happen! I transferred from the ambulance bed to the hospital bed, pushed twice and out came little Cameron at 1:35am. No stitches, no pooing myself, nothing! I had gone from no contractions at all, to having a baby in an hour and a half.

The first thing I remember seeing were his tiny little hands. I couldn't believe how small and fragile he was. I had been told my entire pregnancy that he was going to be a big boy, yet here he was on my chest weighing a tiny 6lbs exactly.

He is now 18 months old, and I can honestly say he is the best thing to ever happen to me.

Laura's Birth Story

I found out I was pregnant very early into my pregnancy. Very early. I remember going for what I thought would be close to 12 weeks, but no, I think I was around 5 or 6 weeks. I felt slightly crushed to be honest. I was going through a hard time already, my so called mummy friends turned on me, and abandoned both Logan and I, which at the time was devastating, I didn't understand why, but now I'm glad. I now have the best friends anyone could think of. But back then I was also struggling with constant nausea, which is so debilitating, and now I had what felt like a lifetime till my 12 week scan, to know everything was going to be okay. Finally it came and seeing the squiggling baby on screen confirmed I could actually already feel her!



We shared our news, after Logans preschool had already found out, as he'd got excited, and then the wait for the next scan came. I got bigger a lot quicker second time round, your body remembers being pregnant which is just kind of amazing. The nausea did ease once I was in the second trimester and I started to enjoy myself. Guessing the gender of "Jelly" (Logan named her!) before the scan is always on everyone's minds. So many ways to "tell", but my cravings were different this time round, with Logan it was pom bears, and salty stuff. With Taya it was sweet stuff, particularly frozen yoghurt. I know everyone just wants a healthy baby, but the urge to have a girl was very overwhelming at times, so when the 20 week scan I was on tenterhooks as the sonographer tried to make this wiggly awkward baby open her legs! Finally at the end just before they gave up they were certain they saw girl bits! Happy is an understatement. In between my 20 week scan and birth I got to have a 3D scan, which is such an amazing experience, even though we didn't get the greatest shots as she had her hands over her face, and was hiding tightly up against the placenta. Amazing all the same.

My partner always said he didn't particularly want to be at the birth, and I respected his decision, not all men do, and I felt he'd be better with Logan. With Logan I had Kiba and my mum as support, but for Taya I asked my sister Sophie. She was thrilled. I was planning for a water birth at the midwife led birthing unit, a part of the hospital in case things went wrong, but more homely. I had a lovely midwife throughout pregnancy, and as things went on I got more and more excited about our new arrival. My due date, and zoo trip, came and went. On the 10th July we were invited out for a fish and chips lunch, it was lovely, but I was having more Braxton hicks than normal, however I didn't think too much about it so carried on the day. Logans bedtime came, and as I was getting him ready the contractions started. I used breathing techniques to try and carry on in case they came to nothing, but soon came to the conclusion that this was it, that there was no point putting Logan to bed. I took him downstairs and told Kiba she was on her way. I phoned up the MLBU when contractions were 5 minutes apart, which wasn't particularly long after I had started! After explaining I was 45 minutes away and had to drop off Logan/pick up Sophie they told me to head to mums and then wait there until they were 3 minutes apart. They were 3 minutes apart as I got to mums.

With Logan at mums, Sophie and I in the back of the car, Kiba drove us to the hospital. If you've been a labouring woman in the car you know that it is the longest drive you'll ever experience in your life. You'll get every red light possible. You cannot get comfortable at all. Anyway, we finally got there, Sophie and I took it slowly up to the MLBU, Kiba met us up there with our bags, and I asked him to stay, although I knew what are plans were. He left and the midwife wanted to do my observations, weight etc, but I got the sudden urge to push, so she decided to take us over to the birth pool. By this point I was in my "zone" I can't say I took any notice of the people around me (I never noticed the student midwife!) or my surroundings, I think the room may of been a pink colour? They had the lights dimmed, and the pool ready. I'm sure I got in in just my bra, but it annoyed me, so I took it off.

I went with my bodies urges and pushed. I remember panicking a bit as Taya never stopped wiggling. I couldn't remember Logan doing so, so it was a bit of a shock and didn't feel great to be honest. I remember Sophie with a flannel. I remember encouraging words. I remember I'd taught myself to repeat over and over "I can do this" while I pushed, and it helped, it really did. I held my breath through the worst pain. I liked to duck my head in the warm water, it felt calming. Shortly before the crowning I felt my waters pop. Such an odd sensation. Then came the crowning. For anyone who doesn't know, this is when the head starts to come out. This is when most mums panic a little, myself included, only briefly before I remembered I could do this, and this meant she was close. Crowning is also the worst pain personally. Your vagina is a ring of fire. You can then feel your own baby with your hands for the first time, but this is a weird sensation personally, something I don't think I can describe.

A few powerful pushes and she was out. My beautiful baby girl was here. The euphoria of that moment is truly indescribable, a moment you can never, ever forget. I'd love to witness it, not just live it, it must be magical, maybe one day I shall. I was granted my golden hour, skin to skin cuddles, and breastfeeds, in the water. Sophie phoned Kiba, he had only just got home with Logan, 45min after he'd left us! Others were informed, as I birthed the placenta naturally and got to have delayed cord clamping, both things that I was worried about as they hadn't gone well with Logan (I shall tell you his story another day) but it all seemed to go so smoothly. I'd done it completely pain relief free, I didn't think I'd be able to, but I did, and in the water! Dreams come true! From first pain to her arrival it was between 3 and 4 hours. Time is fuzzy now..

We then moved back to the other room, Taya was weighed (7lbs 8oz) etc, and then it was my turn to be checked down below, you know, to see how it had coped. By the midwives grimace, and the "Oh..." I knew it hadn't fared well. I'd torn. I was swollen, very swollen. The midwife admitted she wouldn't be able to do the stitches so went in search of a surgeon. I forgot about it as I cuddled my bundle of joy. Then the surgeon came in and I got an even bigger grimace and another "Oh..." and by this point Sophie was interested and asked if she could have a look, she'd just watch me give birth so why not? "Oh..." So it turns out I was in a bit of a mess down there. The surgeon said she'd try but it could be tricky with the swelling. I was given gas and air to cope. Now, I've never done drugs, but oh God, I'm guessing that's what it's like on drugs. Everything goes out of focus, I can't see anything, can only just hear things and I go silly. I'm sure it was hilarious. It was still painful for me though. She did her work and said she'd come check later. Fast forward through more cuddles, breastfeeds, sisterly chats and bonding. Surgeon comes back and there are even more grimaces.

It turns out that the swelling had caused her to stitch me up wrong. Yea.. So, my options were to have her cut it and retry with gas and air but keep perfectly still (apparently I kept jumping with the pain before...), or, have a spinal and go to theatre to have it done. It was a horrible decision. I didn't want to leave my baby and end up staying in. However I didn't think I could cope with the gas and air again. I'm sure I cried. In the end I chose theatre. I knew Sophie would look after Taya. I am terrified of needles, but again I used my mantra of "I can do it". We headed down and I coped surprisingly well with having the spinal. I suffer with anxiety around people I don't know, but they were all very nice. It felt very, very odd not having control over my legs. A new surgeon came in and started work, commenting on the uniqueness of the situation, apparently. She then found a problem from the stitching after logans birth! So she offered me a "designer vagina" in her words, and I accepted. Once it was finally over and I was wheeled on to the ward I had to ask where Taya was, I started to panic a bit as I spent a good amount of time without anyone. Then she came, with Sophie, with Kiba, Logan and my mum. I was gutted. I'd missed both Kiba and Logan meeting Taya for the first time, something I was so excited for, and I still feel sad about now.

Everything went up from there, I healed well, and I managed to get breastfeeding established. We're now at 2 years of breastfeeding, I couldn't be prouder. These 2 years have gone so quickly. I often think of both my births. I love birth. I love to read about it, see photos of it. I'd love to witness it in the flesh. I'd love and hope to train as a doula, to support women to get the births they want. If I could I'd relive it all again, as despite the pain it truly is beautiful.

Emma's Birth Story



I really enjoyed my pregnancy and made sure we had lots of trips to the cinema, meals out and a final holiday abroad. I did pregnancy yoga, a hypnobirthing course, and attended NCT classes. I felt prepared, but I was convinced my little boy would be late. After all first births are always late, aren't they? I soon found out that this is not always true.

At around 3am on my due date I remember waking up feeling a wet trickle down my leg. I thought I'd wet myself in my sleep (it wouldn't have been the first time in the pregnancy unfortunately!) and tried to go back to sleep. But the trickle kept coming and I started to feel the odd cramp. I still wasn't sure whether I was in pre labour, but as the cramp feelings started getting stronger I realised I was actually having mini-contractions and that the trickle might have been my waters breaking. By the time it got to the afternoon I remembered something from my antenatal classes about having to give birth within so many hours of waters breaking in order to avoid infection. I thought it was about time to give the delivery suite a ring. I remember a rather patronising midwife telling me that it was probably discharge and to just stay at home (nothing to do with the delivery suite being full I'm sure...). So I stayed at home slumped over my birth ball, watching Madagascar, trying to eat. Overnight I even managed 4 hours of sleep broken every so often by a contraction - lucky me!

By the morning, my contractions were coming fairly frequently and we were now convinced that the trickle was not discharge but had actually been my waters breaking. My partner was much more insistent on the phone to delivery suite about it than I had been the day before and they wanted me to come in straight away. At 10am (31 hours after my waters broke) I got to the desk with my notes then was swiftly told to labour away in the waiting room as everywhere was full! After about an hour I was moved to my own room on the antenatal suite, a consultant came to see me and told me they wanted to induce me because of the time since waters breaking and the risk of infection (I was right! I had been paying attention in my antenatal classes!), but they had to wait until a space became available on delivery suite, so I was left to labour away. My contractions became more intense and closer together - contractions felt like food poisoning stomach cramps but a hundred times worse. I agreed to internal examinations as I was desperate to know that all my effort so far had not been in vain! After a few hours my lovely midwife told me I was 9cm dilated, but that she didn't quite believe it because I was very quiet and didn't seem like I should be that far gone - those hypnobirthing classes did come in useful after all! Finally at 6pm I was transferred onto delivery suite and was told by my midwife that if I could get to 10cm dilated I could try and deliver the baby naturally without the induction. Unfortunately, the consultant didn't agree and they wanted to induce me straight away with the synthetic drip. I was so tired by this point, and I'd heard that the contractions were going to be worse with the drip (is that possible?), that I opted for an epidural.

The epidural was a mixed experience for me. I was incredibly relieved that I didn't have to feel the pain anymore, but I do believe the pain was quite protective as it puts you in a bit of a bubble. As soon as epidural took effect 'shit just got real' as they say and the reality of the situation really hit home - 'I have just been in pain for the last 39 hours!' 'I've had strangers putting their hands in very private places!' 'I am going to have a baby!' Arghh! I then entered the pushing stage and was told by the midwife when to push which was basically like really straining to have a poo (my pelvic floor has not been the same since). After 2 ½ hours of pushing and getting nowhere the consultant started to get a bit twitchy and wanted to get the baby out. I was told that I was going to have a spinal block and be wheeled into theatre, they were going to try with forceps to deliver the baby, but it might end up in c section. I was so tired and desperate to give my baby a cuddle I really truly no longer cared how I gave birth (so long birth plan!).

I remember being wheeled from my lovely low lit calm room to theatre with its bright lights and lots of scrubbed up medics I had not met before. I remember one of the obstetricians having a strange conversation with my partner about what he did for a living. It all felt very surreal.

The next thing I knew it was 12.04 am and my son Alex was being held above me, he had been successfully born by forceps delivery, and it was like the last traumatic 45 hours had not existed! I felt a mix of raw emotions that ranged from happiness, relief, wonder, amazement, pride, and an overwhelming desire to try and do the best for my little boy. Unfortunately I did not have skin-to-skin straightaway afterwards as I had requested and I had to wait until they stitched me up and wheeled me back to my room to have that first cuddle that had been driving me on through the labour. As soon as I was back in my room I took the swaddle off the midwife had wrapped him in and breastfed my little one for the first time.

A few days later we got a call from my GP that Alex had tested positive for Group B Strep on a swab test, I'm guessing the delay from waters breaking to birth may have contributed to this. As Alex was displaying no symptoms the doctor thought it was best just to observe him but take him straight to A & E if any symptoms appeared. Not what a new first time mother wants to hear! Fortunately he was absolutely fine, but I realise that this isn't the case for many babies and I fully support the campaign by Group B Strep Support to make testing mandatory on the NHS for pregnant women.

Looking back I realise that my birth story sounds pretty traumatic, but I came away from the experience feeling fairly positive. The reason for this is that the care I received from my midwives and my anaesthetist was amazing. I felt they really cared about mine and my baby's wellbeing and they included me and my partner in all the decisions along the way - apart from the last bit in the theatre, I felt in control and respected throughout. Even though things didn't go how I would have wanted them to, this is still my birth story and I feel very proud of it, and I can't thank the midwives enough for being part of it.

Krystle's Birth Story



I was induced with my first daughter which ended in an emergency section. When I got pregnant with our second child I was determined that I wanted a VBAC and was referred to the local woman's hospital for my care and delivery.

We started discussing my first birth and writing a birth plan for this pregnancy, when it was decided that due to the emotional stress that was still ongoing from the treatment during my emergency section I would be having a planned section for this delivery.

Once we had made the decision and started the discussion with the midwives about how it would all happen I immediately felt at ease.

With a planned section you are in control of a lot of the decisions unlike with an emergency.

They started by booking us into a support session with the hospital and other parents to be that were having a planned section. We were educated on the different pain relief methods, then they talked through how the procedure would go. Once that was done we discussed any fears/issues we had about the upcoming section and were taken on a tour of the hospital.

They walked us through absolutely everything from arriving at the hospital, surgery prep, the waiting area, anaesthetists room, a tour of theatre, recovery and the rooms we would be taken to after the birth.

At our next doctors appointment we were booked in for our section and had a meeting with the anaesthetists. Then it was time to play the waiting game :)

On the day we said a teary goodbye to our daughter who was just shy of 2 and we were off to become a family of 4.

We arrived at the hospital at 8am and were told that emergencies aside I should be in theatre at 11. As time passed by 3 emergencies came in and we were all pushed down the list. At 2pm when they were about to bump me for another emergency I started having contractions that had me doubled over. This prompted them to get another team together and send me straight in.

After having been walked through the whole procedure I felt a lot more relaxed than I did the first time around. Once I was in the prep bay everything happened very quickly.

My husband was dressed in his scrubs, my medication and personal information was all checked and doubled check then we were off to the anesthetists room. Once we got there is when it started to feel real. I hate needles and started sweating straight away. The staff were amazing and were distracting me while the epidural was put in. It wasn't enough to stop a few tears escaping but they were very quick and it was done in no time. As soon as that was in and had taken effect I was wheeled straight into theatre.

Once we got in to theatre and the curtain went up, I could feel a bit of tugging and pulling (which is a very odd feeling), and all of a sudden they dropped the curtain so we could watch her being delivered. It was very surreal as within what felt like 5-10 minutes of being in theatre we were holding little Elsie. It took a bit of time once she was delivered for them to stitch up the wound and tidy up. Once that was done we were off to recovery for half an hour, then off to our room to enjoy our new baby girl.

I am glad that I decided to go with a planned section as after all the grief and emotion that came with my emergency section I don't think I could've done it again.

I don't have any photos from the delivery as my husbands phone went flat while we were waiting haha!

Katrin's Birth Story



My story starts three days before my due date, on a snowy day in January. I'd had a cuppa with some Mummy friends and we all marvelled at the snow and how much we'd had that morning. I'd been having headaches, really horrible ones all around my head/up the base of my skull, and wasn't relishing the idea of driving to a shop in the snow to get my husband's birthday present for the next day.

But off I toddled (or waddled) to the car & set off, only to be about a mile from home when someone crashed into the back of me. It took me a full 2 seconds to realise what happened but when it dawned on me I carefully got out onto the icy road to see a young girl standing behind my car, with a look of horror on her face when she saw that she'd crashed into a heavily pregnant woman!

We swapped details and I spent the rest of the day, with the horrible headache, on the phone to insurance people & emailing contract whatnots back and forth. Little did I know this was to be my last day of 'freedom.'

I woke up at 4am for one of my nightly toilet trips. I couldn't get back to sleep but at around 5am, when I rolled over, I both felt & heard a POP. I tried to convince myself that maybe the baby had moved in a funny way but when I felt the trickle I knew...there was no denying it, I had felt & heard the same pop when in labour with my eldest. So the first thing I said to my husband on his birthday wasn't anything birthday related, it was "My waters have gone!!" He quickly emailed the Orange Grove Clinic to say he wouldn't make his birthday massage as his wife was in labour (I had pre-warned them, just in case) & started to put my hospital things in the car.

I hadn't had any contractions yet but rang MLBU to say my waters had gone. They advised paracetamol for the headache that I still had & rest. I messaged my folks in the Midlands, who were on standby to come & look after my 2.5 year old, to say go, go, go - this is not a drill! But not to panic because I wasn't having contractions. The contractions did then start but I just kept breathing through them, practising for the big ones later.

The next part went in a bit of a blur. Our childminder arrived to take care of my eldest until my parents arrived. The contractions weren't very regular or evenly spaced, only a few were quite long, so MLBU were still happy I was at home. I started to feel like they were getting quite long & close together so I thought we should probably set off & just "popped for a wee". Then BAM!

My body was pushing. I had no control of it. I shouted my husband (who had been putting my suitcase in the car) to phone an ambulance. They said to get me off the toilet. I didn't want to move. I was helped onto the floor onto all fours. They said I needed to lie on my back. I didn't want to move. I was helped onto my side then my Mum & Dad arrived! (Record timing from the Midlands to Norwich) My Mum was handed the 999 call as they'd told my husband to go and get some string & a safety pin (??) Mum, bless her, was told to have a look- just what you want, right? There was "no head yet" I heard her say!

Thankfully the paramedics arrived 5 mins after my parents, much to my Mum's relief. "Before we get intimate, my name's Steve, and this is Mark" said one of the paramedics. Mark asked Steve if we were "On a roll" (going in the ambulance) or "Staying & playing" (baby coming now) With one look it was decided we were definitely "Staying & playing". I was so relieved as I did NOT want to move!

Two bottles of gas & air consumed and a couple of pushes then POP, head, POP, shoulders and body.

She was here. A 9lb 2oz baby girl. My bathroom floor baby.

Tea & toast all round (the hospital things were brought back out of the car) and homemade soup & a galaxy ripple for my lunch in bed. Brilliant.

I never did get my husband a birthday present but I did birth him a child, so I think he was ok with it. Many people who I've told the story to think the car crash the day before she was born prompted the slightly early arrival, but I guess we'll never know...maybe she just wanted to share her Daddy's birthday, to be a forever reminder that his house is now dominated by wilful women.

I will never tire of telling this story - bodies are amazing!

Esme's Birth Story



My first baby was brought into the world by Emergency Cesearean following induction and it took me a while to come to terms with it. When I got pregnant again almost 2 years later I felt really strongly about giving birth as 'naturally' as possible. I went on a hypnobirthing course, practiced lots of relaxation and was intent of refusing induction.

My due date came and there were no signs of my baby making an appearance and lots of people were commenting on how high he still was. Being consultant led I had many hospital appointments where my options were discussed and induction or planned cesearean were always mentioned, but I refused all of these and said I wanted to give my baby a chance to come when he was ready. As I reached a week past my due date I saw the consultant again and decided to book myself in for a planned cesearean at 42 + 1, still believing that he would definitely be here by then. I went home and decided to try as many methods as I could to get this baby moving.

At 41 + 5 I spent the whole day walking and squatting and at about 3pm I started to feel a very dull ache inside. Never having experienced this before I wasn't sure if it was a false alarm but I called my mum and husband who was at work just to warn them that something may be happening. I started to get regular pains which weren't too strong but were very close together. I was having a VBAC so I called the delivery suite who told me to take some paracetamol and stay at home until it became more uncomfortable, then make my way down.

At about 9pm and walking various laps of the living room trying to speed things up I told my husband we should go. The car journey made the contractions very painful and timing them on my phone they were 2 minutes apart. When we arrived at the delivery suite we were asking to wait in the waiting room, the pains were so intense by now that I couldn't sit down but weirdly my stomach didn't feel like it was tightening.

We were shown to our room and by the time I was examined the midwife told me I was 1cm dilated. I felt a bit embarrassed that I was in so much pain but hardly dilated at all, if it wasn't a VBAC I would have been sent home which was a very scary thought. The midwife was lovely, she put some star lights on the ceiling, made us both a cup of tea and told us to get some sleep and she would re-examine me in a few hours. By now the pains were getting unbearable, I couldn't get comfortable in any position so I started listening to my hypnobirthing recording and reminding myself to relax and take deep breaths. I managed to zone out for the duration of the half hour recording lying on my side.

When the midwife came back it was about midnight and I couldn't wait to be examined as I was sure the baby was almost here. When she told me I was 2cm I wasn't sure what to do with myself, no way could I handle this pain for another day or so. I was given some gas and air which helped take my mind off it. A female consultant then came into the room and examined me, she said the baby was still really high and as my contractions weren't forceful enough he wasn't pushing down. She asked me if I wanted her to try and break my waters to speed things up. In desperation and going against everything I had practiced in hypnobirthing I said yes.

My waters were broken, and the consultant then looked very concerned as my baby still hadn't started to move. By this point the contractions were extremely painful and I remember gripping the midwives hand very hard. As my husband decided to go to the toilet the alarms began to sound and about 10 medical staff members came into the room. They all looked at the machine next to me in panic and having been here once before I knew my baby's heart rate was dropping.

I was handed a form to sign to authorise a cesarean as my husband started to get dressed into his scrubs. As I was wheeled down I was praying for some pain relief as it had become quite excruciating. In the operating room I had to sit up which was extremely difficult whilst they tried to inject the spinal. Once again the consultant was looking at the monitor with a very concerned look which was when I heard the heartbeat stop. As the spinal hadn't started to work yet I was told they were going to put a mask on me and put me under General anaesthetic. I shouted to my husband to 'please give him skin to skin'. I then lay with the mask on my face thinking please hurry up and fall asleep or they are going to have to do this whilst I'm awake and feeling it! The next thing I knew, I was awake with a few nurses around me who looked at me and asked if I wanted to meet my baby. He was then brought to me by my husband who had been holding him for about 2 hours and had already nicknamed him 'piglet' as he'd been making little snuffly noises whilst trying to latch on to my husband's nipple!

As dramatic as my birth story may sound I actually found it a lot easier to come to terms with than my first as I had accepted that birth plans don't always 'go to plan'. The after care I received in the hospital was amazing and we were all home the following evening. My little boy has been the happiest, most content little baby which goes to show that traumatic births don't always affect the baby which was one of my main concerns, I think being relaxed during pregnancy helped so much.

For all the information parents need to know in
Norwich, head to the website:

