



ISSUE# 11 Article 1 : Giving Birth 1 - Dreaming about what's to come

"... the woman gives a cry that seems one of astonishment, jubilation, pain and triumph - perhaps also of ecstasy - mingled in one great shout. The baby's head slips through, and then the whole body tumbles onto the cloth that is spread to receive it. Immediately the woman looks down, scoops up her baby, and lifts it to her breast: "I can't believe it! It's incredible! Don't cry, little one! My baby! My baby! Fantastic! Incredible!"she exclaims over and over again, eyes shining and wet with tears, laughing and crying at the same time. She is in her husband's arms and he is kissing her. Nobody intrudes. He kisses the baby's foot, then his wife again. He is crying with the joy and wonder of it too. This is what birth is like for some women, this is what birth can be."

Dr Michel Odent - Birth Reborn

In an active physiological birth like the one described above, the processes of labour and birth unfold naturally and spontaneously, without any disturbance. This is largely due to effective secretion of the most important birth hormone -- oxytocin.

Oxytocin is secreted by the pituitary gland, deep inside the hypothalamus, or 'old brain' at the base of the skull. During labour it is released in regular pulses. This gives labour its rhythm of alternating phases of rest and contractions.

If you are hoping for an active natural birth like this, then it is essential to ensure that the room where you are giving birth is calm, intimate and peaceful.

You need deep privacy to relax with the birth process, to concentrate on the powerful feelings in your body without any external distractions. This encourages the best possible flow of oxytocin and also the hormones called endorphines, which are your body's natural pain killers.

Distractions such as too many people around you, overheard conversations, a feeling of being watched, a brightly lit room or a tense atmosphere can inhibit the secretion of oxytocin and slow down labour. There will be more about birth hormones in the next issue.

When we read Michel Odent's description of an active birth, we can imagine that the mother gives birth in an upright position such as a standing or a supported squat, or possibly on all fours and then sits down to touch and pick up her baby. Or such a birth may happen in warm water in a birthing pool.

The midwife is sensitive to the mother's needs and is unobtrusive. She makes sure that all is progressing normally and protects the mother's freedom and privacy.

Her first concern (in addition to observing the well being of mother and baby) is to encourage the natural sequence of events. In these circumstances there is a natural continuity between the birth itself and the first contact between mother and baby afterwards.

The first hour after the birth, when you and your partner welcome your new baby is magical. Holding your new-born baby in your arms for the first time is one of the best experiences of your life.

Here at last is this little person who has become so familiar inside you for the last nine months. The first moments when you look into those beautiful wide open eyes, stroke that little body and feel the silky softness of your baby's skin are unforgettable.

If it's not possible to do this immediately after the birth, as happens occasionally, you can relish these first moments with your baby as soon as possible and quickly make up for lost time. (Remember to undress both yourself and your baby in a very warm room and cuddle up skin-to-skin, just as would happen immediately after giving birth.)

Your baby may be calm at birth or may cry for a while. Safe in your arms, he or she is encircled and comforted by your body and the soft tones of your voice. Your newborn baby will be exquisitely sensitive and able to feel, hear and see what is

happening at close range.

In the issues to come, I will be telling you more about the incredible interactions that happen between you and your baby in the first hour after birth and how they are naturally designed to protect you both.

With your birth now about six weeks away, make sure that you discuss your dreams and wishes for the big day with your chosen birth attendants.

While it is important to be flexible in your attitude and to be open minded, you also need to feel secure that all the ingredients are there to support your intentions for your birth. You still have time to review your options and make a change if you wish to.

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