

The 'Birth You In Love Project'

Birth Preparation Tips

What 'Is The Birth You In Love Project'?

Welcome to your **free download** of birth preparation tips. These tips will signpost you to information where you can do your own research and also present the choices I made in preparation for my own birth.

It is my view that these tips to help women prepare for a better birth experience **should be available to everyone for free** and that cost should not preclude anyone from having access to this information.

Our idea is **to turn the ideas presented in this document into a series of bitesize films** that we will put on a YouTube Channel **for free**. This would **make access to information about how to prepare for a normal natural birth, more accessible to everyone**, not just those with the time, ability and inclination to do their own research.

Support The Birth In Love Project

The project is to crowdfund to make some bitesize birth preparation films so ALL women will have FREE access to them online.

All we ask is that if you can donate to the project, even if it is just £5), please give what you can to make it happen.

If you wish to find out more about The Birth You In Love Project, please donate using this link:

<http://bit.ly/Clickheretodonate>

With Love, Kati xx

“Childbirth – All or Nothing” (BBC1, Tuesday 24th February, 2015)

My home water birth featured on “Childbirth – All or Nothing” (BBC1, Tuesday 24th February, 2015)

It is still available on **iPlayer** until March 27th, 2015 and **You Tube**.

iPlayer : <http://bit.ly/ChildbirthAllorNothing>

YouTube: <http://bit.ly/ChildbirthAllorNothingYouTube>

I have been overwhelmed by the positive and love-filled responses since my birth appeared on the show. **I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Xx**

Importance of Preparation

On the show, my wonderful midwife Emma Healey said that, **'Preparation is key'**. By preparing well, I stacked the odds of everything going well in my favour. I wanted to share the choices that I made in preparation for my birth and to signpost people to information about that they can use to make the best choices for them and their families.

From Fear to Confidence

I started my birth journey from a place of fear. I was fortunate to have met a few people who showed me that birth does not need to be painful or traumatic and I learnt that there are things I could do to help myself.

Promoting Choice

These tips show the choices I made and will direct you to resources where you can ask own questions and learn about what is right for you in your own unique set of circumstances.

Why normal birth?

Normalising and de-medicalising birth would not only save the NHS money but it would reduce the trauma associated with birth that many women suffer. If women could prepare

in pregnancy and learn techniques of how to relax and cope in difficult situations, this would also pave the way for their own better mental health in the future and that of future generations.

To me these benefits are an obvious consequence of offering real choice in maternity care. Certainly in my ante-natal classes, there was a whole section on what pain medication is available but little, if anything, on how to prepare well for a positive birth experience.

“If birth preparation methods were freely available within the current system as well as options of pain medication for those who choose that path, then THIS WOULD OFFER REAL CHOICE.”

With love,

Kati x

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Preface

When I started to think about how I was going to give birth, I knew that I wanted to have my baby in the safest and calmest way possible. So I did lots of research. I started to meet women who were coming away from their birth

experience feeling like the birth itself was an incredible amazing positive experience. And I thought ‘wow, what sets these women apart from people who are not coming away from their birth experience feeling positive.’

And so, it occurred to me that by preparing well, I would be giving myself and my baby the best chance of entering into this world naturally in a calm safe way, and if nature did go awry, as it occasionally does, at least I would have felt I had done everything I could to avoid that happening.

My preparation for birth resulted in me having my two little girls at home, naturally without intervention or medication. Many people that I speak to ask me what I did to prepare. In fact so many people asked me how I did it, that I thought I’d write it down so I don’t have to keep repeating it! And then I thought I’d make a film about it!

I did lots and lots of research and from that research, I learnt that if you prepare well, you can massively increase your chances of things going well. Because I knew that I had prepared well for birth, I knew that if anything did not go according to plan and I needed intervention, the intervention would be necessary.

There are so many options and it may be hard to figure out how you want your birth to be, so I hope to share with you the choices I made to prepare for birthing my two little girls and why I made those choices.

This is not a comprehensive guide to everything you can do, it is simply a rundown of the choices I made to give others some ideas of things you might think about.

I hope that these tips can give you some ideas about how birth may be prepared for and guide you to books and other material that may be helpful in your quest for your own natural birth.

Twenty Top Tips for Birth Preparation

1. Knowledge is Power; Books and Other Resources that can help you to believe in your ability to give birth

How do you feel about giving birth?

I had always thought that somehow while other animals are perfectly designed to birth their offspring; dogs, cats, that somehow humans aren't.

What I now know is that we humans are perfectly designed to give birth. The human race is really successful. We've been doing it for a long time without intervention and without medication. It is extremely important that we have the medical profession for times when we need it but it is my belief that the system is unintentionally disempowering as it is. Certainly in my ante-natal classes, there was a whole section on what pain medications are available but hardly any attention was given to ways that women can prepare themselves for birth. There are many WAYS THAT WOMEN CAN PREPARE FOR BIRTH. I chose my own path. LET'S GIVE WOMEN REAL CHOICE BY PROVIDING METHODS OF BIRTH PREPARATION IN THE MAINSTREAM AS WELL. THEN WE CAN EXERCISE REAL CHOICE!!!

Here are some resources and links you may find useful:

- I read **Ina May Gaskin's books, Ina May Gaskin's Guide to Childbirth** and **Spiritual Midwifery**. I found that these books gave me more confidence to birth my baby naturally.

- I have heard excellent reports from:

Pam England's Birthing from within: An Extra-Ordinary Guide to Childbirth Preparation and also

Grantly Dick-Read's 'Childbirth without Fear: The Principles and Practice of Natural Childbirth'

- **Tellmeagoodbirthstory.com** is an excellent resource. You can also find a birth buddy here if you wish; someone who has a positive story to tell and can support you to tell your own positive story. Or you may have a friend with a positive story. Ask them how their birth was. Soak it up. Your birth can be like that too;-)

Link: <http://bit.ly/TellMeAGoodBirthStory>

- Rikki Lake made a great documentary called '**The Business of Being Born**'. It's about how birth is over-medicalised as it's essentially a business. I would highly recommend watching this if you wish to prepare yourself for giving birth naturally.

Link: <http://bit.ly/BusinessOfBBorn>

- **AIMS (Association for Improvements to the Maternity Services)** is a brilliant website which tells you about the latest evidence in midwifery and it explains it in a way that's quite easy to read which is good;-).

Link: <http://bit.ly/AIMSLink>

- The **Positive Birth Movement** is brilliant too. It supports the idea that you can still have a positive birth experience no matter what choices you make or how your birth unfolds as long as your choices are respected and you feel informed. Parents share positive stories of birth in a scare free environment. You may wish to see if there is a group near you.

Link: <http://bit.ly/PositiveBirth>

Home Birth Resources

If you are considering a home birth, these resources may help you find out more information:

The **Greater Manchester Home Birth Support Group** has got some great videos and other resources. Their **videos** discuss the safety of home birth with midwives explaining why giving birth at home is a safe and viable option for many women.

One from a father's perspective:

<http://bit.ly/Fathersinfavourofhomebirth>

Midwives talk about the tools of their trade

<http://bit.ly/ToolsOfMidwivesTrade>

Midwives answer some frequently asked questions:

<http://bit.ly/MidwivesQandA>

This link provides information on **books** regarding home birth:

<http://manchesterhomebirth.org.uk/resources/recommended-reading/>

I found the '**home birth chat group**' on **facebook** a fantastic source of support. On this forum, midwives, doulas and other pregnant women freely ask questions, share tips and support each other. There are other forums available. You can find one that is right for you. There may be a local one in your area where you can meet with other likeminded parents.

Believing In Our Ability To Give Birth

We need people around us that also believe in our ability to give birth normally; our birth partners and our midwives. This will help with our own confidence.

Doctors who support births in hospital may never see a normal, natural birth; they only see births that have gone wrong. Consequently, they are more likely to think that birth is inherently dangerous as opposed to inherently safe.

2. Have a birth plan

It's a good idea to have a birth plan; so everyone knows your vision of how you want the birth to progress; and then you will know that everyone involved will be singing from the same hymn sheet so to speak. Your birth partner can be responsible for making sure that everyone reads it.

Of course, occasionally our babies don't co-operate with the plan so it might be an idea to add that if things do change, you would like to be informed of what is happening so that you can choose what to do. Or you may want someone to advocate on your behalf, for example your birth partner or a doula (a professional birth partner) if you have one.

3. Consider Who Will Be Around When You Give Birth

It is so important that your midwife and those around you trust your body's ability to give birth. Just like in any job, people are different. Some midwives will thrive off an emergency situation while others are passionate about normal natural births and will give you the very best support to achieve this.

In An Ideal World We Would Know The Midwife That Attends Our Birth

Evidence suggests that there are better outcomes if you have continuity of service from your midwife. I used NHS midwives from the Wythenshawe home birth team for Matilda's birth in 2011. Over the course of my pregnancy, I saw nine midwives and I saw no one midwife more than twice. Miraculously, the midwife I clicked with the most and really wanted to be at my birth was at my birth and she was amazing.

The second time in 2014, I used the One to One Midwife service. One to One operate as independent midwives but are commissioned by the NHS so you don't have to pay. They are only available in a few areas of the UK; Liverpool, Manchester and parts of Yorkshire but they are expanding so it might be worth checking to see if they are in your area. I only saw one midwife throughout my pregnancy. This is a truly incredible service.

If no such service exists in your area, you may want to try to get to know the midwives that are likely to attend to you at your birth.

*Highlighted in green: May not to be used in the film but might be interesting to people who are in an area where 1-2-1 operate (Merseyside, Manchester, Yorkshire I think!)

4. Consider having a doula.

A doula is a professional birth partner. They are there to give you emotional support before the baby is born, during labour and in the post natal period too. The evidence suggests that having a doula who provides continuous support during labour, women have shorter labours, fewer complications, and fewer caesareans. Women are also less likely to need pitocin (a labour-inducing drug), drugs for pain relief including an epidural, and forceps or vacuum extraction. They are also more likely to be satisfied with their birth experience. Research shows that all women should be allowed and encouraged to have continuous support during labour.

Doula UK provides more information about Doulas. There is also a doula access fund if you do not have the means to pay for a doula. You can find more information here:

Link to Doula UK: <http://bit.ly/DoulaUK>

I had the wonderful **Dot Parry** at my side for both my births. Dot taught me Natal Hypnotherapy. She is based in Manchester and is a trained midwife, a Natal Hypnotherapy Teacher and an NCT Antenatal trainer. I felt I needed this extra support especially during my first birth as I didn't know who my midwife was going to be.

Here is the link to find Dot: <http://www.birthprepmanchester.co.uk/>

5. Consider your place of birth

The best place to give birth is where you feel safest. Birth happens best when you feel safe in your environment. Think of any animal giving birth. They go somewhere quiet and safe to birth their offspring. If others intervene, they are unable to birth as effectively.

When the midwife at my first appointment asked me where I was having my baby, I said what do you mean? I thought you just have your baby in hospital.

'O no', she said, 'You can have your baby in a hospital, or a birth centre or at home.' '

'At home for my first one, I don't think so!'

She said, 'Well it can be a good option for some people.'

I was really surprised about this so I came home and started to read to about why on earth people would choose to have their babies at home, and the more I read, the more I thought, 'why wouldn't you choose to have your baby at home!'

One of the classic lines that people say when I tell them I birthed my babies at home is "Wow, you're brave!" and I always say 'Really, I think people are brave to have their baby in hospital!'

Don't assume that having your baby in hospital is necessarily the safest place. It will depend on your circumstances.

There is always an element of risk involved in birth but choosing to have your baby at home, especially if you are considered low risk, is actually *safer* for the mother. It's the best chance you have of you remaining in one piece and the evidence says that for many women it is just as safe for your baby as a hospital birth. If you are deemed medium or high risk, it's worth assessing exactly what the risks are so that you can weigh them up and make your own choice. Remember, it's your birth and you are 'allowed' to do what you want.

Your decision on where you give birth will depend on many things; where you live, the facilities and resources available to you and the health of you and your unborn baby. But for me, to have my baby at home seemed like the best decision.

Having had two babies at home, I can't imagine making that car journey when you are in labour. Having to leave your comfortable environment at home to get in the car and drive to hospital, then to be examined etc can be enough to

reduce the hormones in your body to stall labour which can result in medical intervention.

So you may have heard that women are sometimes given a drug for 'failure to progress' when they are considered to not be dilating fast enough. But that drug can lead to a whole catalogue of further intervention which is more likely to result in a c-section . The evidence suggests that when women are left to their own devices and are not overly interfered with, the likelihood of a positive and safe outcome increases.

So if you are just allowed to 'get on with it' in a place where you feel comfortable, and for me that was at home, your body is likely to progress more effectively.

Picture this; a wildebeest is giving birth in the savannah. Suddenly a lion approaches, the birthing wildebeest senses danger and will stop birthing its baby. She needs to be completely comfortable in order to birth as nature intended and anything rocking the status quo will halt her progression.

Humans are the same, we progress far better if comfortable and uninterrupted.

Midwives are trained to deal with emergencies. They carry all sorts of equipment so there really is no need to worry any more than you would in a hospital.

If you are low risk and it's not your first baby, the evidence says that having your baby at home is AS SAFE for your baby and safer for you. Sometimes things go wrong, no matter what location you choose to have your baby in but it has nothing to do with place of birth. When things go wrong at home you can bet that people blame the fact that it was a home birth but actually the same would've happened in hospital and the outcome would've been just the same too.

For example, having the cord wrapped around the babies neck is actually very normal you just unwrap it. The baby takes everything through the placenta. But you can bet your bottom dollar that if that happened in hospital everyone would be relieved that they were in hospital and glad they weren't at home but the truth is that it would've been dealt with in a similar way at home. If you do need to go to hospital you could. You're unlikely to be a million miles from a hospital and they would be waiting for you. The important thing is to weigh this up and make your own choice about where to give birth.

Also, if you choose to give birth at home, you are likely to have two midwives who are dedicated to you (as opposed to perhaps half a midwife!). Certainly in my area, you start off with midwife and when you are nearly there, the first midwife will call out a second midwife. I was really happy when I saw the second midwife because it meant that I was nearly there! In a hospital, midwives may be busy supporting other women on the ward. If you have a pool at home, you know that you will be able to give birth in water should you wish to do so. In hospital there may be a chance that someone else will be using the pool.

So, for me, giving birth at home was definitely the best option.

However, if you believe giving birth in a birth centre or a hospital is the safest place for you, then it is! Just work out your options, and make your own decision.

6. Learning to relax and breathe - Self-Hypnosis in Childbirth makes sense!

When I became pregnant *in 2011*, I looked at the mass media's portrayal of birth. These women looked scared and out of control and my first thought was that I absolutely do not want my birth to be like that. I thought there has to be a better way.

My husband had heard on the radio about Natal Hypnotherapy so I looked into it and I booked myself on a Natal hypnotherapy course.

And what I learnt was that if we are tense during the birth, then we perceive more pain. If we can learn to relax our bodies and minds, then the sensations that you feel during birth are manageable. The sensations that you feel that are pushing your baby down are strong, but manageable.

So it didn't take up too much of my time to listen to the CD each day; from about 20 weeks, I listened to the CD most evenings. There is one track that's 15 minutes long and another if you've got more time that's about 40 minutes long. It's just an excuse to have really nice chill out time with your unborn baby. So I'd lie down on the sofa, turn down the lights, close my eyes and listen to the CD's.

You learn to relax your mind and body so instead of going 'OMG, this is the most painful thing ever!' You have lots of tools to manage the sensations of giving birth.

If you don't believe that this can work, then check out the stats. The national average for a c-section is 33%. For people who listen to the CD's this goes down to 15%. And if you do the course as well, it's 8%. Pretty amazing hey? Just by being more prepared mentally, this increases your chances of avoiding major surgery and having a normal birth.

I think the word hypnotherapy sounds a bit scary and unobtainable. A lot of people say to me, 'well, I wouldn't be able to do it. I can't put myself under' or they say 'how is it possible to relax when you're in so much pain'.

All self-hypnosis really is is learning to relax. Learning to relax really deeply. Learning to relax every molecule of your body and when you think that you can't relax anymore, you go a little bit deeper.... relaxing more and more with every breath. And when you practice this everyday, then it's much easier to attain that state of relaxation when you really need it, like in childbirth or in any other situation when you might need to relax.

For me, the three major things that I practiced were;

1. Visualisations – Instead of focusing on the sensations you're feeling you give your mind something else to do. So the ones that I used were;
 - a. A perfect beach; clear blue sea, salty sea air, palm trees swaying in the gentle breeze; imagining myself totally relaxed and at peace.
 - b. I imagined a sunset falling below a choppy sea. I imagined that the air that i breathed out was golden light and that when I breathed out that light would spread out across the choppy sea making it calm and flat. I concentrated so hard on this image during each contraction that by the time I realised that the contraction was really strong, I was on the other side of the contraction. Then all I had to do is look forward to the next contraction.
 - c. I imagined a dial where you can turn the pain down from 10 to 1 (although in the name of Spinal Tap my dial went from 11 to 1!)

Strangely, although I practiced these images when it came to my births I used totally different images and statements. During my second birth, I used images taken from 'Hypnobirthing' as well as some of my own images. For example,

1. I imagined a picture of a lotus flower and imagined peeling back the petals that represented my cervix opening up;

2. I imagined an archetypal image of a strong woman giving birth and imagined this was me! I will soon provide representations of these images in this document;
3. During each contraction. I imagined or visualised the baby moving down the birth canal. I really think this helped the baby to move down more effectively.

There are many different brands that help you to relax and feel more confident in birth. I used Natal Hypnotherapy with a bit of Hypno-birthing! If you wish to use hypnosis in birth. You can go on a course or to listen to the CD's, just choose a brand that resonates with you.

Here are some links to different methods;

Natal Hypnotherapy <http://bit.ly/NatalHypno>

Hypnobirthing – The Mongan Method <http://bit.ly/HypnobirthingTMM>

Lazy Daisy Birthing Classes <http://bit.ly/LazyDaisyBC>

There are other brands available too. These are just the ones I can personally vouch for as they have been useful for me or my friends. There will no doubt be other types too that will help get you in the right frame of mind and teach you techniques you can use in your birth.

I also did an Active Birth Rehearsal Workshop which was about using different positions to birth your baby. I found when I was giving birth that I only needed one or two positions. I just listened to my body and did what was most comfortable. Being able to move around and try different positions during labour was very useful and being in water really helped with this

because of the weightlessness effect. This workshop also helps to give your birth partner a role as Dave learnt techniques about what kind of massage or touch might be useful. We didn't use most of this stuff but I think knowing it really helped.

Until I was in labour, I didn't know that between the contractions you can't feel anything; there is no pain at all! So for me, all I needed to do is to give my mind something positive to do while I rode out each contraction and make sure I look forward to each contraction; after all each contraction is bringing was bringing me closer to your baby.

2. Positive thinking – I had positive statements which I had written out and put around my house like 'All I need to do is breathe and relax' because that is all you need to do 'breathe and relax'; your body will do the rest. There are loads of statements to choose from or you can make your own up. Just choose ones that resonate for you.
3. The self doubt phase; This is the part that most women will think 'I can't do this' . If you think this, it means that you are almost there. You are almost ready to meet your baby. You can do it. You are doing it! Because I knew about this phase, I didn't articulate that I couldn't do it. I knew that I could and that I was nearly there!

Although many people have sent me comments that my birth looked 'relaxing' (lol), I wouldn't describe it as that! It took all my might and my strength to concentrate and to focus my mind on what my body was doing. The second time it was much easier though. I found any distractions annoying and just wanted to be in 'my cave'.

It sounds really boring but I felt practice was the key. When you have practiced these images and statements lots of times, your mind will more easily be able to access them when you really need it. Practice practice practice. If you just practice a little bit each day, this will really help.

And one more tip, some people are really good at visualising; at seeing things clearly in their mind; images and pictures BUT if you worry that you can't visualise, that you can't actually see in your mind the beach or the sea or the baby coming down your birth canal or whatever, don't worry. Just know that it's there. That's enough. You don't need to see it, just know that it's there.

This kind of relaxation can give your birth partner a set role too. For example, my husband and I practiced with the cue word 'RE-LAX' while he stoked down my arm and when he did this, I would relax every molecule of my body.

The key is being confident in your own ability to give birth just as millions of women have done before you and to practice relaxation techniques so when the time comes you will be able to relax your body at will. Your body knows what to do just as it knew how to grow your baby!

There are many different 'brands' out there of Self-Hypnosis for birth. I practiced Natal Hypnotherapy but I also had some ideas of Hypnobirthing.

7. Using water help to manage pain.

The relaxing effect of water, with its support and warmth, can help you through your labour. If you are considering whether or not to use a birth

pool, do it! It provides a perfect nest for you to birth your baby in. The weightlessness you experience in the water can help you to move around and get your baby into a good position for birthing. Listen to your body. If you want to move around and try different positions you can do this more easily in water. I loved giving birth in labour. If you are considering whether or not to get a pool, my recommendation would be to get one. If you don't like it you can always get out but chances are you will.

8. Stay active during your pregnancy

You can continue to do the exercise you love. I did hula-hooping and capoeira (an afro-brazilian martial art) as this is what I normally do. It is important to keep as fit as you can. Listen to your body. Don't overdo it, Your body will tell you when to stop. I did a bit of swimming and pregnancy yoga too (but these weren't really my cup of tea!). Just do what your body can manage.

You can try to get your baby in a good position while pregnant. I had heard that the babies of the women in the Chinese rice fields are always in a good position because of the position they work in so...

No slouching on sofas! Sit upright or lean slightly forward while you are pregnant.

Get on all fours like a cat! Clean the floor on your hands and knees. My floors have never been so clean before or since!

It might be a good idea to sleep on the left hand side; because your liver is on the right hand side of your abdomen, lying on your left side helps keep the uterus off that large organ sleeping on the left also improves circulation to the heart. This allows for the best blood flow to the foetus, uterus and kidneys. But don't worry if you can't do this or if you keep rolling over to your right hand side in your sleep. Sleeping on your back is unlikely to be comfortable because the baby's weight presses on your inferior vena cava and the discomfort will

probably wake you up. In the later stages of pregnancy it might be helpful to experiment with propping yourself up with pillows to make it more comfortable.

9. Diet and Nutrition

Much to my dismay, I learnt that pregnancy wasn't an excuse to do no exercise and sit around eating for two! In fact, I learnt that you don't need to eat any more calories than normal except in the last two months when you only need to eat an extra 200 calories.

There is lots of commonly available advice on foods to avoid when pregnant, such as soft cheese, pate or too much fish which have high levels of mercury. I mostly heeded this advice as well as taking tablets which are specific for pregnancy.

10. Drink Raspberry Leaf Tea in the 3rd Trimester

It is generally recommended to start taking it from 32 weeks. Raspberry leaf tea is said to strengthen the uterine muscles and tone the pelvic floor so it will help to make the uterus work more effectively when pushing the baby out. It is also said to assist with breastmilk supply, aid the mother's immune system and promote better circulation.

Studies have shown that women who take raspberry leaf tea have a reduced incidence of birth interventions and shorter second stages of labour than those that don't. Although more extensive research is needed, current findings suggest that raspberry leaf tea may decrease the likelihood of pre and post term gestation so you'd be less likely to be induced artificially or require a c-section, forceps or vacuum birth.

I got the herb from Neals Yard. In my third trimester, I made a flask of it every morning and I made sure I drank it by the end of the day.

Does it taste nice?

Hmmm No! But I felt like it was doing me good. You can get it in tablet form too or in teabags if you can't hack it xx

11.You don't need to have vaginal examinations if you don't want them

As I said in tip 2, humans progress far better if comfortable and uninterrupted.

I've had two babies. With the first I had vaginal checks to see how dilated I was but with the second I didn't. My second labour progressed much, much faster 6 ½ hrs as opposed to 36 ½ hrs.

But how do you know how far gone you are?

If the midwife knows you well, they will be able to tell by how you are and the little noises you make☺

So you had checks with the first?

Yes, With the first, I kept having to get out the pool to have checks. I didn't know any different. I just did what the midwife told me to.

But you didn't with your second?

When my midwife arrived at my home 3 ½ hrs after I felt the first twinges. I asked if she was going to check me. She said that she could check me but that it wasn't standard procedure. She said that there was no evidence that 'checking makes any positive difference to the progression of labour. She said that the language that is used 'You're only 3cm, or you're only 5cm' can actually dishearten you so you won't progress as you should. I was amazed.

‘How will I know how far gone I am?’ I asked. ‘Don’t worry’ she said, ‘you’ll know’. So I chose to experience no checks.

And she was right. My body just got on with birthing my baby in a far more efficient way when uninterrupted. Quite amazing!

12. Know that induction is controversial!

In my ideal world, I did not want to be induced. Induction leads to a catalogue of intervention that I did not want so I scoured the internet and forums for ways to help my baby to come along. It turns out that no-one knows what makes contractions start! If your baby is ‘late’, maybe it’s just not ready yet.

In the UK, our span for ‘full term’ is from 37-42 weeks. If you go past your estimated due date (EDD) it’s ok because full term isn’t until 42 weeks. And in other countries, such as Germany, full term goes up to 43 weeks! The longest pregnancy on record was that of [Beulah Hunter](#), a 25 year old woman from Los Angeles, who gestated her baby for 1 year 10 days. So, if there is pressure on you to induce, find out what your actual risks are and weigh this up in the light of the benefits of not being induced and allowing your baby to come naturally in its own time.

There are several different theories as to what does make labour start. Therefore, it seems to me, that it is open to interpretation as to what it is that does make labour start.... So here is my story, and how I think my labour was kickstarted!

What Caused My Onset of Labour? Were My Babies Just Ready To Come Then Or Was It Something Else?

So with Matilda, my first, six days before my due date, I went to Capoeira’s Secret Santa Special. I was to give my present and get a present too. Capoeiristas had come from all over to play at our club; Leeds, Wales,

Sheffield. There was a full orchestra and the energy was brilliant. My Mestre asked me to play with him. I thought he was joking. He was 9 months pregnant! But he wasn't joking. He said, 'Come on. We will just play slowly!' So I started to play. I had underestimated the value of Muscle Memory and my body just started to play and before I knew it I was doing all sorts of kicks and escapes and my legs were going higher than my head. I didn't even think it was possible. I played for about a minute until I got tired. The following morning at 5.30am I started to feel twinges in my stomach. Ooops! I thought I had done myself some damage but it was the start of my labour. Matilda appeared 36 ½ hrs later!

So with Seraphina's imminent arrival, I wanted to try to emulate this. So, I did lots of anecdotal research as to what mothers felt made their babies come and I put some of these ideas into practice....

I made sure I had fully prepared at home and finished everything I needed to. I ate pineapple. I told the universe I was ready to meet my baby and I told my baby I was ready to meet her (or him). I put on my favourite comedy sketches and laughed a lot. I played my favourite phattest breaks tunes, guaranteed to induce that loved up feeling and danced around my living room. I stayed happy. I told everyone I'd be going into labour on Tuesday or Wednesday. By 6pm on Wednesday, I started to think it hadn't worked. I sent a work email, booking in a meeting for the Friday but at 8pm, my waters broke and Seraphina arrived 6 ½ hrs later.

So I laughed, stayed happy, got really loved up, jumped around and made sure I was ready to meet my baby.

What if Your Baby Doesn't Come?

If you want your baby to come and he or she doesn't, trust that it is simply not ready yet and it will come in its own time. Trust in your innate ability to work together with your baby in order to give birth when you are both ready.

Ina May Gaskin talks about making sure you have cleared all unfinished business in your relationships etc and are worry free at this point. Good luck!

13. Create Your Birth Space The Way You Want It

My husband called the way I created my birth space ‘the six senses approach’.

I wanted to feel really safe and have everything I needed around me so I thought about all my senses and thought what I could have around me.

1. **Sound;** I had made a massive playlist of my favourite tunes. My favourite chill out tunes for actually giving birth were Zero 7 (Simple Things, When It Falls and The Garden), Air (Talkie Walkie and Moon Safari), Sia (Lady Croissant) and Massive Attack (Mezzanine).
2. **Taste;** I made sure I had my favourite foods in. When I first when into labour I ate a big meal because I wanted to have enough sustenance to last me. And stuff to munch on later; toast and chocolate trifles☺
3. **Touch;** The feel of the warm water is amazing pain relief and allows your body to feel weightless so you can move around into different positions as you wish. Anyone who doesn't like the idea of giving birth in water has clearly not done it lol.
4. **Sight;** the room was dark, lit only by candles and fairy lights.

Also in my birth space, I had a little shrine to my family to help me remember all that was important to me; I had a picture of my little girl, a gnome because it reminds me of my husband, some wooden mushrooms to represent nature and a golden buddah statue that reminded me of the power of my female spirit and the calmness that can be achieved during birth.

5. **Smell;** I had an oil burner and burnt my favourite smelling oil – ylang ylang. I mixed this with lavender for relaxation and clary sage that is often used in labour.

I also used an aromatherapy stick, which my friend's mum made me. It contained rose absolute, lavender, clary sage and juniper which not only smelt beautiful but are thought to be beneficial in labour, and the stick was a welcome distraction and yet another tool which really helped me to relax.

6. **My intuition;** knowing that my body would know how to birth my baby; all I had to do was breathe and relax 😊 If my body needed to move into a better position, it could. When you move around, the baby may find it's way down the birth canal in a better way than being in one fixed position.

14. Have a variety of distractions to help you manage the sensations

When I say I had no pain relief, that's not strictly true. I had tonnes of pain relief; the pool, the relaxation methods (your mind is incredibly powerful), endless lower back rubbing from my birth partner with the first birth and a TENS machine.

I used a TENS machine during the labour of my first birth and it was fantastic. The electrical pulses are a strange sensation and are a welcome distraction from the contractions. I could control the strength of the pulses myself. I hadn't practiced using the machine before and it probably would have been wise to have looked at it beforehand! With my second birth though, the sensations were in a different place and I didn't find the TENS so useful. Using my own hands to press inwards on my hips really helped this time as it makes the pelvis open more.

With my second birth, I didn't find massage from others very helpful this time. I just wanted to be left alone to get on with it so bear in mind this might be the case and tell your birth partner to be prepared that you may or may not need assistance 😊

15. Consider the Environment When The Baby Appears

I wanted to my baby to arrive in a calm and beautiful way. I wrote in my birth plan that when the baby arrived I didn't want any whooping and hollering and squealing. I wanted it to remain dark and quiet and calm. With the first baby I asked for this, but there had just been a shift change of midwives and they were busy chatting amongst themselves when the baby arrived and there was too much whooping for my liking. My baby cried a lot and this upset me.

So, with Seraphina's birth, Dave, my husband, was under strict orders to ensure that everyone was quiet for this birth and they were. When Seraphina arrived, I don't think she had known she had been born for two ½ weeks, she was so calm! She let me know about it when she did wake up though! In my second birth everyone respected this and it was awesome! When she arrived she didn't cry. In fact, she was so calm, I don't think she knew she had been born. It took her 2 ½ weeks to wake up but she let me know about it when she did eventually wake up 😊

16. See the delivery of the baby and the placenta as one

Once you've had the baby, the placenta still needs to be delivered.

In our culture the baby is born and the delivery of the placenta is almost an afterthought. With my first, the midwives suggested I have a managed 3rd stage because they didn't think it was coming out fast enough so I was given a drug to make it come out faster. Like all drugs, there may be side effects and I would rather not take these risks if at all possible. Recent studies have suggested that a managed 3rd stage may interfere with the establishment of breastfeeding. With my first baby where I had a managed 3rd stage, breastfeeding took several days to establish. With the second where I had a

physiological 3rd stage, she was able to latch on and feed right away. Obviously, with my sample size of 1, this is hardly robust evidence in itself but it does

In some cultures, the birth is not considered over until the placenta is delivered. On birthing their baby, the women sit quietly and wait until the placenta is delivered. Lighting is not changed and everyone remains quiet. In these cultures, the placenta is usually delivered shortly after the baby and it is very rare that complications arise. Luckily I knew about this so once I had the baby I waited for the placenta in the knowledge that my body had not yet done its job. This time the placenta arrived within minutes.

17. Delayed Cord Clamping

Evidence suggests that it is best to wait until the umbilical cord has stopped pulsing to make sure the baby gets all the blood from the placenta. It might not be standard procedure so do make sure you ask for it!

18. Have skin to skin contact after birth

There is lots of evidence about the many benefits of skin- to skin contact. We know that babies who have spent an hour in skin contact are significantly less stressed after the birth experience- this means that their breathing and heart rate are more stable, they cry less, and when they start to feed, they digest their food better.

19. Consider what to do with your placenta

The placenta is an organ which keeps the baby alive. It's an amazing thing!

Anecdotal evidence suggests that ingesting it can help ward off the 'baby blues'. When someone asked me when I was pregnant, what am I going to do with my placenta, I was like 'what?! What do you mean?' She said that she ate a piece of hers and I remember thinking that was really weird. So I came home

and I did loads of research as to why on earth anyone would do that? And the more I read, the more I thought 'why wouldn't you do that?' For me, it was sooo important to bond with my baby after the birth. I wanted to give myself the best possible chance to bond and be as healthy as I could so that I could look after my baby and enjoy the early days. In our culture, the baby blues is almost considered a normal part of birth. It usually happens around day 3 after the birth when tiredness sets in after the baby high when all your visitors have been. You get a slump in energy and feel more emotional than usual.

Women who ingest their placenta often report, however, that they do not get this dip in energy or emotion. For me, I wasn't willing to risk it and I wasn't prepared to let some cultural ideology that says that eating your placenta is weird get in my way. There hasn't been any high quality research about this because it doesn't make anybody any money but people who do it usually are very pleased they did.

Some people save it to have it encapsulated, or make a pie with it or some people make a smoothie!

I chose to make a smoothie.

Now, it's not like you whizz up all your afterbirth and drink it! It's far more refined than that! I chose to eat it over 3 consecutive days after my birth in increasing amounts each day to replenish my body of the nutrients it has lost. It made sense to me to do it this way to ward off that energy dip on day 3

How to do it!

Keep your placenta covered in the fridge. Wash it. Figure out which bits you can eat; the meaty bits not the sinewy bits lol

My recipe: a couple of large handfuls of frozen berries (like raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, blackberries etc.), soya milk. Blend it all together then add placenta! So; Day 1, put in about a crab sticks worth!

Day 2 put in about 3 crab sticks worth!

Day 3 put more in than day 2 😊

It will taste just like a normal smoothie, honestly ;-)

20. Trust it Was Meant To Be

Whatever happens on your birthing journey, trust it was meant to be. I wish you love and luck as you set about your new chapter.

If you can support the Birth You In Love Project please do.

Thank you so much for reading and following my birthing preparation journey. I hope it gives you some ideas,

With Love,

Kati xx