

## Birth - it can all be in the mind

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ZACHARY Gant is a happy bouncing baby boy who weighed in at nearly 10lbs when he was born seven weeks ago at his parents' home in Barford St Martin. The arrival of a bundle of joy at such a healthy weight would surely be enough to make his mother's eyes water, one would think.

Not so – Hazel Gant is one of an increasing number of mums in the area who are turning to mind over matter to control labour pains.

Before Zach's birth, she attended a Hypnosis in Childbirth programme run by hypnotherapist Sharon Mustard with the blessing of Salisbury district's NHS maternity services.

In fact, it was Hazel's community midwife who suggested the two-day course might be beneficial.

Hazel, 32, had a long labour with her first child Scarlett, now nearly three-years-old, and has suffered two miscarriages since, so was understandably anxious about the outcome of this pregnancy.

"My first labour was long, although there were no complications, but there were points when I didn't feel in control and times when my pain level went through the roof," she says.

"I wanted another home birth but I wanted to keep the tension and fear levels down and feel more in control.

"I was anxious because I had two miscarriages last year and couldn't believe this was going to go right.

"So my midwife said: why not try hypnosis."

Internet research revealed positive feedback and she had heard through the grapevine of other mums in the area who had benefited, so she went along to Salisbury District Hospital to attend a free taster session on hypno-birthing.

Sharon Mustard has been a practising psychotherapist and hypnotherapist since 1995 and started running

her hypnosis for childbirth courses in early 2006, quickly winning the support of local midwives.

She has trained all the hospital-based and community midwives so they can offer active support to women using hypnosis techniques during labour and birth.

The NHS now funds the half-hour introductory workshops she runs once a month at the hospital on the second Thursday of each month from 7-8.30pm to give mums-to-be like Hazel a taster session.

Hazel immediately signed up for the course, which Sharon runs over two Saturday mornings between 9.30am and 12.30pm at The Well Body Centre in St Ann Street, Salisbury.

“It involves relaxation, breathing techniques, pain management and a lot of advanced visualisation,” explains Sharon.

“In childbirth, fear, anxiety and negative expectation exacerbate pain and make it worse.

“Given your body already knows what to do, you don’t want to produce stress hormones.”

What self-hypnosis does, she says, is give women confidence in their own ability to stay calm and relaxed, removing fear and panic and giving women control of their labour.

The programme teaches pain management skills and aims to equip women to manage rather than fear childbirth.

“It is about changing the expectation of birth,” she says.

“If women expect to be in agony, they are likely to experience it.”

Instead, it is supposed to shorten labour by lessening the anxiety felt during each stage and significantly diminish the need for medication and reduce the need for intervention. It’s claimed it can increase positive emotions during the birth process, and reduce the incidence of post-natal depression.

Hazel was 34 weeks into her pregnancy when she went on the course, and says she would have liked to have gone earlier to give her more time to practice the exercises.

It’s preferable if women can attend with their birth partner, but it’s recognised this is not always possible.

But come the big day, the preparation paid dividends.

“I had two days of niggly nothings and knew that something was afoot,” says Hazel.

“As soon as I realised I was in proper labour. I put on my iPod – I had been practising the exercises to some CDs and hearing them prompted me to do all the things Sharon taught us.

“The breathing exercises were amazing and made a huge difference.

“There are little phrases you can say to yourself every time you hit a contraction, which reassure you everything is normal.”

Two-and-a-half hours later, Zach made his entrance into the world.

“I’m not going to lie and say I didn’t feel anything,” says Hazel.

“But it changed my perception of what I was feeling.

“My midwife said she noticed I was very calm and was working with my body rather than against it.”

Whisper it quietly, but Hazel says it was such a positive experience, she’d happily do it again.

“That’s not bad just seven weeks later,” she says.

For more information on Hypnosis for Birth, you can visit Sharon’s website at [www.mustardhypnotherapy.co.uk](http://www.mustardhypnotherapy.co.uk) or telephone 01980 623089 or mobile 0775 430 3987.

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