

Hello!

Hypnobirthing is all about relaxing and learning to trust your body. To make sure you are as well prepared as you can be for your calm, confident birth, you'll need to practice relaxation, read this handbook, and work out what tools work best for you. I'll guide you as best as I can, but in the end it's going to be you, your baby and your support people that are there on the day.

Nicki Lampon

Hypnobirthing Childbirth Educator

Are you ready for a calm, confident birth?

Hypnobirthing isn't woo-woo, hippy-dippy nonsense! It's actually common-sense, straightforward stuff that all pregnant women should know. Hypnobirthing will change the way you feel about your upcoming birth. You'll release the fear, boost your confidence and realise that all you have to do is trust your own body for a birth that will leave you feeling empowered. You just need to let go of some of the thoughts and beliefs you've picked up along the way...

What is Hypnobirthing?

Women have been birthing for millions of years – we were designed to do it, and our bodies know what to do – but quite often our over-thinking human brain gets in the way. This makes labour and birth harder than it was ever intended to be.

Hypnobirthing is a set of tools for birth. It helps you release your fears and concerns by understanding where these have come from and what is normal and what is born out of fear.

Hypnobirthing allows you to reprogram your brain to free yourself of fear or negative expectation and build trust in your body. It gives you powerful yet simple tools to allow your body to be relaxed during your baby's birth. To put it simply, a relaxed body, embracing trust, equals an easier birth.

These powerful tools are for every type of birth. If your birth goes in a different direction to what you hope, Hypnobirthing will help you remain calm, feel more in control, be more comfortable and ultimately view your baby's birth as a positive event.

Feeling fearful

When it comes to birth, most women have some pretty negative expectations. These are likely to come from other people's stories (hands up if you've been told a horror story), the TV, movies, social media and our overthinking minds, which wonder how a big thing gets out of a small place. Or, maybe you've had a bad birth experience yourself and this is affecting your current thinking.

Expecting the worst is likely to result in a lot of fear, and this impacts on the birth process and particularly on comfort levels.

How are you feeling about your upcoming birth? Write down any fears or worries you may have. It might be helpful for both you and your partner/birth support person to do this.

Fear-Tension-Pain

If you're fearful, you become tense. This is always the case when we are fearful. Even if you're just watching a scary film, you are likely to be full of tension. We are not in conscious control of this response.

If you're giving birth and tense, this tension doesn't allow the muscles in your uterus to work effectively and easily. (Remember, muscles work best when they are relaxed.) If your muscles can't work in harmony, you'll experience pain. Once a woman giving birth feels pain, she feels like everything she's ever heard or read about birth is true. She gets more fearful, tenser, it hurts more. The cycle continues. Add to this that when you are fearful you'll also be pumped with adrenalin, the fight or flight hormone (which we will talk more about soon). It's no wonder fear impacts birth so massively.

Fear creates Tension, which creates Pain – F-T-P (which funnily enough also stands for “Failure to Progress”, the medical term for a labour that is struggling – possible due to Fear-Tension-Pain!)

Hormones

During labour you release a wonderful cocktail of hormones.

Oxytocin

Oxytocin is often referred to as the love hormone. We produce it at times of falling in love, making love, bonding and empathising. It's what connects us with others. Oxytocin is the power behind surges, and when the baby is born it is oxytocin that provides the connection and bond between parents and baby. It also has a huge role in breastfeeding.

The more oxytocin, the stronger the surges; the less oxytocin, the weaker the surges. Lots of women enjoy the feeling of oxytocin in their bodies, helping them to relax, and some women will feel almost euphoric. Oxytocin also helps distort a women's sense of time, enabling her to feel like time is passing more quickly. Oxytocin is said to be a shy hormone, working best when we are unobserved. It flourishes when lighting is dim and when we are feeling relaxed and safe.

Endorphins

Endorphins are our feel good hormones and reduce our perception of pain. They are said to be a couple of hundred times stronger than morphine. Joggers often talk about a "runners high" when experiencing a physically demanding point in a run. This is the release of endorphins, which mask any pain or discomfort they could be feeling. Endorphins are also said to trigger a sense of calm. It's useful to know that endorphins increase over time during labour, building as your surges build.

Make notes of things you could do during labour to boost oxytocin and endorphins.

Adrenalin

Adrenalin is the survival hormone. You release it when you are afraid or sense danger. It gives you a boost of energy, your heart pounds and suddenly you are on high alert, unable to relax. Fear tells your body that there is a potential danger, so it is flooded with adrenalin.

If we think in terms of evolution, this is essential. Any time we feel fearful, our body responds with adrenalin in case we need to escape or fight. However, our mind and body don't discriminate; they can't tell whether our sense of fear is because of real danger or simply a perceived threat. In terms of birth, this means that we have a similar response if we feel fearful of birth.

When labour begins, for some women their mind goes into danger mode. They remember all the horror stories and TV programmes they've seen about birth. They are flooded with adrenalin. They feel panicked, struggle to relax, and energy is sent to the arms and legs to run or fight. This is not useful – you can't run away from labour. You need blood flowing to your uterus.

Unsurprisingly, being pumped with adrenalin will slow down labour. (Why would your body want to birth if there's a perceived threat? It wants to keep you and your baby safe by delaying things until you get to safety.) This is really quite clever stuff when there's danger, but these days birth is normally safe. We just need to get your unconscious mind to believe that too...

So we really need to minimise adrenalin by:

- Releasing any fear you have of birth and creating a positive birthing mindset.
- Considering carefully the environment that you will birth your baby in.
- Choosing the right people to support you.
- Having tools so you boost calming endorphins, oxytocin flows, and adrenalin is reduced.

Endorphins rule	Adrenalin rules
Immune system boost	Fight, flight or freeze
Blood carrying oxygen flows normally through the body	Blood carrying oxygen is redirected to defence muscles
Digestion is normal	Digestion is slowed
Mother is comfortable	The uterus is oxygen deprived
Baby is comfortable	Oxygen to baby is limited
Baby's heart rate stays stable	Baby becomes distressed
Need for pain relief is reduced or even eliminated	Baby's heart rate is unstable
Immune system remains strong	Pain is created; labour is prolonged
First and second phases of labour are shorter	Failure to progress (FTP)
Happy and healthy mother and baby	Interventions and/or surgery are needed

Creating a positive mindset for birth

This takes work and repetition but is absolutely doable and will be worth it!

Be aware of what you are putting into your mind

Watch and read positive birth stories. Make those your new normal and avoid horror stories.

Watch your words

Words are powerful. Replacing words that may have a negative association is a simple yet powerful tool. Have a think about your associations with commonly used birthing words. How would you feel about using alternatives?

Here are some suggestions. What else could you add?

PAIN	DISCOMFORT
CONTRACTIONS	SURGES or WAVES
LABOUR	BIRTH
PUSH	BREATHE DOWN
FALSE LABOUR	PRACTICE SURGES
COMPLICATIONS	SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES
PATIENT	MUM AND DAD

Make your thoughts positive

Tell your mind what you want rather than what you don't want. The use of positive affirmations is a great way to influence your thoughts (more on that later).

Use visualisation

This is a key technique in sports psychology. Your mind doesn't know the difference between real and imagined. Visualise the birth you want: you are then convincing your mind it has done it before. Your MP3s can help with this.

Listen to your Hypnobirthing MP3s

During these enjoyable and relaxing times you are guided into a calm place mentally. When you are in a relaxed, calm place your conscious mind is less receptive so subtle messages are powerfully absorbed by the unconscious.

Develop your understanding of your incredible birthing body

We fear the unknown. The more you learn the better.

Affirmations

These are simply positive statements, but they are incredibly powerful during birth.

Repeatedly seeing/hearing these positive statements helps you gain confidence in the birth process and trust in your body and instincts. When we repeat any statement over and over again it soon becomes a belief. Perhaps that's how some of the negatives got there in the first place?

I am informed and empowered.
I trust my body to know what it is to do.
My mind is relaxed; my body is relaxed.
I feel confident; I feel safe; I feel secure.
I meet each surge of my body with calmness.
I relax as we move quickly and easily through each stage of birth.
Each surge brings me one step closer to meeting my baby.
I fully relax and turn my birthing over to nature.
I am comfortable and calm.
I feel my body gently sway with relaxation.
I am prepared to meet whatever turn my birthing takes.
My baby moves gently along in its journey.
My body and my baby are healthy and strong
Each surge of my body brings my baby closer to me.
I am totally relaxed and at ease.
I know that birth is safe.
I bring myself into deeper relaxation.
Each day my love and confidence grows.
My baby will be born at the right time for an easy birth
I welcome my baby with happiness and joy.
I'm a strong and powerful woman.

Writing your own affirmation

Focus on a belief that you have about birth that does not make you feel good. Reverse it. For example, if you keep focusing on labour being an excruciatingly painful experience and this makes you feel anxious, write the opposite: "My baby's birth is comfortable and I am strong".

Write in the present tense as if it is already your reality: "I am..." rather than "I will...". Write in the first person "I".

Focus on what you want. When you think/talk about your upcoming birth it can be very easy to think/say: "I don't want this.." or "I hope _____ doesn't happen". This is then where you are focusing most of your energy and our minds don't hear the "don't" bit, they just hear the thing. For example, if someone says, "Don't think of a pink elephant", all we think about is a pink elephant. In terms of birth you can end up constantly focusing on what you don't want to happen, and this brews fear. Get into the habit of using words to reflect how you want to feel and use positive words such as calm, supported, informed, etc.

Calm breathing

Get yourself comfortable, allow your back to straighten, and rest one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.

Take a slow deep breath in through your nose to the count of four, completely filling your lungs and breathing down into your abdomen.

Then breathe out very slowly through your nose to the count of eight. Allow the breath to just fall away rather than pushing it out.

REPEAT

The difference in the length of the out breath compared to the in breath helps quickly trigger relaxation in your body. You should feel the hand on your abdomen moving more than the hand on your chest.

Practice this daily. An ideal time to practice is any time you feel any stress or tension come into your body. Feel the difference it makes to your emotional and physical state. If with practice you struggle to reach the count of 4 and 8, feel free to adjust the count. The key is making the out breath longer than the in breath.

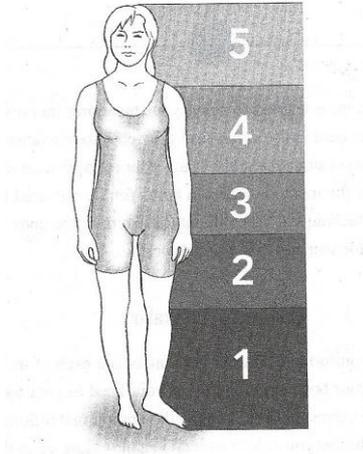
Your basic practice schedule

Simply thinking “I’ll use these tools in labour” isn’t enough. The more you practice the better, as this way you are conditioning yourself to be super relaxed during labour and you are creating your positive birthing mindset. Here’s a guide to what you can start practicing now.

- Listen to at least one MP3 daily.
- Practice calm breathing daily whenever you feel a little stressed.
- Be positive about birth. Avoid listening to negative stories. Start influencing your mind in a positive way by reading positive stories, watching positive births, changing your birthing language, using affirmations, etc.
- Start visualising the birth you want, not the one you don’t.

Quick relaxation techniques

Imagine your body is split into five zones.



5 – From top of head to shoulders

4 – From shoulders to waist

3 – From waist to hips

2 – From hips to knees

1 – From knees to feet

Start by calm breathing and then think the numbers to yourself.

As you count, allow your body to go absolutely limp, starting from the top of your head all the way to your waist, your knees, your ankles, to your feet. Let your head droop, your shoulders sink into the frame of your body, your arms droop, your knees droop and separate, and your ankles relax.

And then try this one, great for deepening your relaxation...

Imagine yourself standing at the top of a short, safe stairway.

With each step down you take, breath in deeply and out slowly. Feel yourself going deeper into relaxation. Count down from step to step until you reach the ground and feel thoroughly relaxed.

Facial relaxation

Tension in the jaw results in tension in the pelvic area. There is a direct connection between the mouth and the vagina. Think of lovemaking. Where does it start? What would happen if the mouth remained tense?

Place your awareness on the muscles in and around your eyes and sense relaxation spreading down your face from your forehead. Place the tip of your tongue where your pallet and upper teeth meet. Allow your lower jaw to recede.

Facial relaxation is one of the tools your birth partner can use to help you. Using a thumb and middle finger, gently sweep across the jaw to the middle of the mouth.

Creating anchors

We are all capable of being conditioned. This means that we can build associations that can trigger feelings without us having to make a conscious effort. You want to trigger yourself to become relaxed on demand (i.e. during birth), knowing that this is going to make the experience easier and more comfortable. Anchors include:

- Scent
- Sound
- Touch
- Images.

Creating a smell trigger for relaxation is simple. Choose a fragrance that you are going to use during your baby's birth. Perhaps it's a relaxing room spray, an essential oil suggested by an aromatherapist, a favourite perfume, etc. Every day when you are relaxing, smell your chosen scent. Repeat this daily. It's this repetition that builds this powerful yet simple anchor. This means that when you smell this scent during birth it triggers a lovely relaxed state. This is such a useful tool if birthing outside of your home in places where scents may be unfamiliar or you may even have other associations with them.

You can also create relaxation anchors with music, textures, etc. The key is in the repetition! So use them often. For example, a playlist during birth isn't as powerful as a playlist you've built an association with. Many women find that their Hypnobirthing MP3s become an anchor for relaxation and really love listening to them during their labour and birth.

Write down some of the things you are going to use as anchors so that you remember to add them to your daily relaxation.

Birth Partner's Soothing Strokes – Partner Script

(Birth partner instructions in brackets: Sit or stand to the side of your partner. Your partner should be resting in whatever position she is comfortable in. Speak slowly and calmly but there is no need to change your voice – your partner already loves your voice!)

Do feel free to change any words to make it feel more like you. Pause frequently to allow her to absorb the words you are saying. If you do use this script in labour feel free to leave the last bit out, leaving your partner to relax rather than bringing her back to alertness.)

As you are resting so very comfortably, just allow your breathing to slow down and deepen; so soft and so easy.

Breathing in... and breathing out... breathing in... and breathing out... breathing in... and breathing out.

As I speak, feel your body soften as it relaxes so easily. Your face relaxes... your jaw... your neck... your shoulders... your arms... your hands... down your back... your chest... your abdomen... your pelvis... your thighs... your knees... your calves... your feet... so very relaxed.

(Stroke her wrist and hand gently with your fingertips.)

As you rest so comfortably with me by your side you notice that I'm softly stroking your wrist and hand. Enjoy the soft soothing strokes. Enjoy the calming sensation. Feel calm and relaxed as your whole body sinks. That's right.

Your hand feels so safe and so relaxed right now as you enjoy this gentle sensation. You feel your relaxation deepen with each and every stroke. Enjoy this time.

(Pause and just continue stroking.)

These soothing strokes and my calm reassuring touch reminds you how I will be there to support you during labour and your calm birth as we get to meet our beautiful baby. You feel your endorphins flow and you feel so happy and at ease. You notice just how much more deeply you relax with this lovely comforting sensation.

The soft strokes remind you that you find it so easy to relax and you value its importance now, when you are in labour, when we meet our baby and after our baby is born.

And during this relaxing time, your mind wanders to the moment we meet our baby. The feeling of pride, empowerment and joy. You hold onto that powerful feeling.

(Pause.)

You know that these soft strokes will help you return to this lovely relaxation whenever you feel them.

So now allow the awareness to return to your body. Feel some gentle movement in your fingers and toes... And when you are ready allow your eyelids to feel lighter and come back to this room, feeling calm and alert.

Tips for an induced labour

If an induced labour becomes a possibility, remember that you can still have a positive experience.

- Build up your endorphins before you start the process – use comedy, etc.
- Do everything you can to boost your own oxytocin levels – hugs, dim lighting, relaxation, privacy, etc.
- If you are being continuously monitored, ask if the volume can be turned down so it's less distracting. Ask if there is a wireless device.
- If you struggle to keep mobile, use the bed in creative ways. Most women find being upright and moving more comfortable and it can also speed up the process.
- Trust that your Hypnobirthing techniques will be powerful however you birth.

Avoiding an induction

It's very common for women to start looking into things that might nudge them into labour after their estimated due date or in the run up to a proposed induction. However, unless your body and baby are ready these things probably won't make a difference.

If you do try any of these suggestions, do them with no expectation. You don't want to end up feeling frustrated; you want to feel calm and at ease.

- Sex and nipple stimulation.
- Fear release and deep relaxation (listen to your MP3s).
- Walking.
- Spicy foods.
- Eating dates (start at around 36 weeks).
- Complementary therapies such as reflexology, acupuncture or massage.
- Clary sage (only use this after **at least** 37 weeks).

Using your B.R.A.I.N.S.

If you are faced with a decision in pregnancy or during birth this is a really useful acronym to prompt you to ask important questions. This could be a decision about induction, a caesarean birth, speeding labour up, a change to your place of birth, etc.

Always use your BRAINS!

B – What are the **Benefits**?

R – What are the **Risks**?

A – What are the **Alternatives**?

I - What do your **Instincts** tell you?

N – What if we were to do **Nothing**?

S – Please give us **Space** to consider our options.

Where possible ask for a bit of time to weigh up your options and make your decision. If this is a decision during labour itself I'd strongly recommend that your birth partner takes the lead in asking questions to help you remain as relaxed as possible. Know that there will often be several options available to you and you are likely to have some time to make a decision.

Dealing with a change of plan

Birth is just like life and no one can tell you exactly what will happen. Sometimes we do all we can to stack the odds towards having the birth we want, but our body or baby has other plans. Sometimes we do need a bit of help. But whether that's an assisted birth, something to speed up labour, an induction, or a c-section, remember that your Hypnobirthing tools and a calm and positive birth mindset will always come in useful. Positive birth comes in all shapes and forms!

I know what I can control and I let go of what I can't

This affirmation – “I know what I can control and I let go of what I can't” – is key for a positive birth. It's totally normal to feel disappointment if things don't go the way you hoped, but having the ability to focus on the stuff you can control helps massively. Your birth partner can help you to do this. In the vast majority of circumstances there will still be plenty you can control and plenty of good in the situation.

The birth process

Birth consists of four broad stages. The timing of each stage will vary from woman to woman, but knowing what is going on may help you feel more at ease with the sensations you are feeling.

Early labour (or the latent phase of labour)

Before the cervix begins to open it becomes soft and thin. Surges then gradually open the cervix. This is the early part, traditionally the period before your cervix is 3–4 cm open. This stage varies in length, from a few hours to days, and can be start/stop. Most women stay at home for this phase, wherever they are birthing, and some will be unaware of most of this stage while others may feel some discomfort. Your surges might be inconsistent and vary in length and time between them.

Possible signs that you are in the latent phase:

- Braxton Hicks coming more regularly than usual.
- Back ache and/or period-type sensations that get progressively stronger.
- Intermittent sensations that may be early surges and which begin to build.

In this early stage it can be useful to do and act as you normally would and try not to focus on the fact that labour may be starting. You may not want to be far away from home, but it is fine to still do gentle activity if you want to. Keep hydrated and eat little and often. Rest when you need to – it's useful to conserve energy.

When sensations/surges get stronger you may want to:

- Have a bath.
- Listen to music or Hypnobirthing MP3s.
- Use relaxation techniques.
- Get your partner to massage you.
- Distract yourself by keeping busy or watching comedy.
- Try and nap if it's night time or you are tired.
- Use upright positions when awake and keep mobile (a birth ball is great for this).
- Create a relaxing environment (consider your lighting, scents, music, etc.)

You are far more likely to progress to active labour if you are feeling calm and relaxed.

What are your plans for early labour?

The first stage (active labour)

This is when your cervix is between 3–4 cm and fully open (10cm). This is the stage where you'd probably be admitted if you went to your place of birth or your midwives would offer to stay if you're birthing at home.

Surges become more regular and consistent. Having three surges in ten minutes (with each surge lasting around a minute) can be a useful indication that you might be in this first stage of labour. Make yourself at home wherever you are birthing and follow the lead of your body. Use whatever tools you want to help you remain calm, relaxed and as comfortable as possible.

As this stage progresses and birth is closer some women are unable to talk through their surges as they require all of their focus. Towards the end of this stage of labour, when you are close to being fully open some women will experience a stage called *transition*. This is where your body is dilating the last little bit and transitioning to the next stage of labour. They may feel that their surges become very close together and perhaps more intense. They may question themselves and feel they need more to keep them calm. Just knowing that this might be transition and soon enough your baby might be here is often a great focus for women.

The second stage

Once your cervix is fully open (dilated to around 10 cm), your body begins to move your baby down the birth canal and out of the vagina.

Now each surge will be working in a downward direction and your surges will feel different as your body begins to bear down. Work with your body at this stage using birth breathing. This avoids creating tension (compared to forced pushing), and allows the body to work at its own pace, decreasing the risk of tearing. However, if you feel an overriding urge to actively push, go with that instinct. Listen to your body. Other people telling you when to push is not as useful as following your body's lead.

Upright positions are often the easiest and most comfortable way to birth your baby, allowing gravity to help and maximising the space in your pelvis. Really useful birthing positions are UFO (upright, forward and open) positions: squatting, standing, kneeling, all fours, etc.

The third stage

Once your baby has been born, he or she will still be attached via the cord, receiving blood from the placenta. Keeping the cord attached until it goes white means your baby receives all his or her blood.

A short time after your baby is born your placenta follows. Remember that this is soft and squishy so nothing like birthing a baby. You can either have a natural third stage or it can be managed via an injection, which can speed up the process. The injection is normally recommended after a birth involving interventions, as these may mean you've got a higher chance of extra bleeding and the injection can help with this.

Surge/‘up’ breathing and birth/‘down’ breathing

Surge breathing and birth breathing use the same technique as calm breathing, but they are timed to your surges and you will try adding visualisations to them.

Surge breathing or ‘up’ breathing

During the latent and first stage you will be doing surge breathing. When you start feeling a surge, take a slow deep breath in through your nose to the count of about four, completely filling your lungs and breathing down into your abdomen.

If the surge is short, you may be able to breathe out slowly through your nose as it fades away. If the surge is longer, breathe out slowly and then take another slow breath in. Repeat until the surge passes, breathing in and out slowly and calmly, with the out breath always longer than the in breath.

As you breathe in, think ‘up’. Your muscles in your uterus are pulling up, and your cervix is releasing and opening, so visualise ‘up’ things:

- As you breathe in, imagine the sun rising. As you breathe out image the sun rising higher in the sky.
- As you breathe in, see yourself blowing bubbles that get bigger and bigger. As you breathe out, see them dance upwards.
- As you breathe in, imagine yourself beside a hot air balloon that is being filled. As you breathe out, see it being released and floating up into the sky.

Birth breathing or ‘down’ breathing

Once you have passed transition and your baby is moving down, you will switch to birth breathing or down breathing. Breathe in the same way as for surge breathing, timing your breathing with your surges, but as you breathe out, direct your breath into the back of your throat. You may find you make a mooring or humming sound, or you may want to be more vocal. It is all good as long as you are breathing! This is a focused, powerful breath as if you are following your baby down and out through the birth canal. Remember to breathe out through your nose – it is more powerful.

As you breathe out think ‘open’ and ‘down’. Try these visualisations:

- Imagine ripples going out on a pond, moving out and out in a circle.
- Imagine a soft rose opening.
- Imagine a waterfall with water flowing downward peacefully.

The best place to practice this breath is each time you go for a poo. You can almost feel your pelvic floor release with each breath out.

Birth partner's role

Ultimately you are the one who protects, supports, creates the right birthing environment, and helps your partner listen to her body and remain comfortable.

- When she wants you to, take responsibility for calling your midwife. Ensure your care providers have a copy of your birth preferences.
- Think about your environment; try and make it as relaxing as possible. A dimly lit room helps your partner feel safe and encourages the right hormones to flow. Put on relaxing music/Hypnobirthing MP3s, use relaxing scents, etc. Hide any clocks. A focus on time can make it feel like it slows down.
- Talk quietly and calmly. Remember the importance of words.
- Breathe together. Remind her of her visualisations.
- Remind her to drink and eat small amounts if she wants to. Remind her to pee.
- Use light touch massage or soothing strokes if she wants to be touched. Provide hugs, kisses and reassurance.
- Encourage her to follow her instincts e.g. birth in positions that she is most comfortable in.
- You are your partner's spokesperson. Remember your BRAINS if you need to make any decisions about interventions. Questioning helps you to make decisions that you are both happy with.

If you have a wobble...

It is normal to feel a bit nervous about birth; we often feel nervous before big events in life. Know that nerves and excitement are a very similar feeling. It is very unlikely that these nerves will be present at your birth.

Useful things you could do:

- Talk to your birth partner, they are there for far more than the birth itself.
- Speak to your Hypnobirthing instructor. They want to support you and may be able to point you in the direction of something that could help you.
- Write down your worries, acknowledge that they are just thoughts and then tear them up.
- Listen to your fear release MP3. This is exactly what it's there for.
- Write some positive affirmations. Watch and read positive births.
- Write out your birth story as you'd like it to happen in past tense as though it has already happened.
- Take some time out to relax, book a massage, practice your breathing, etc. This will reduce your stress hormones.