



Creating your ideal birth environment

Whether you are choosing a homebirth, midwifery centre or hospital, it's time to consider how your environment will affect your experience. First of all take some time to consider the right birth environment for you. Many first time mums often choose a hospital birth because they believe it is the safest place to be but if you are a low risk mum with a low risk pregnancy it is worth having a conversation with your GP and midwife about the benefits of homebirth or midwifery centre and gaining the support you and your partner need. If you are a second time mum then it's definitely worth looking into different options that are right for you and your family and avoid any poor experiences you may have had before.

Michel Odent, the obstetrician and pioneer for childbirth stated "...one cannot actively help a woman to give birth. The goal is to avoid disturbing her unnecessarily." He recognised the role that Mother Nature plays in triggering the delicate twining of hormones which can bring both mum and baby into a baby led birth.

Giving birth in an environment that makes us feel calm and safe, helps us to enter an altered state; allowing a transformation of self on many levels. It brings both us and our baby into a place of surrender and love. Hard to imagine isn't it when scenes from the Television Series "One born every minute" are probably flashing through your mind? But you as a woman have the right to create (as much as you can within your situation) the type of birthing experience you want.

When a mum and her baby are left relatively undisturbed and in an environment where she feels safe and supported, the dance of labour can find its own rhythm and tempo urging the baby towards his mother's arms. It's easier to create this type of environment in your home but it is also possible in a midwifery led centre or hospital.

The type of environment we choose is more important than we think. Imagine for a moment if you will that crucial stage in your relationship where you and your partner made love for the first time. Were the lights dimmed or off? Perhaps you enjoyed a romantic dinner and a little wine beforehand? Were you gentle and careful with each other, considering the other's feeling? Perhaps you were passionate, nervous and excited? Or did you do it on a hospital bed with people walking in and out of the room asking questions, the lights on and people watching you?

ALL CONTENT (filmed and written) of The Thoughtful Body™ and Mama's Pilates™© are under the Copyright of The Thoughtful Body™ and Mama's Pilates™© and the Intellectual Property of Rachel Rafiefar (unless otherwise stated). This document cannot be reproduced or copied without prior permission from the author Rachel Rafiefar.

During childbirth there are four major hormonal systems that are common to all mammals which come into play. These are oxytocin, the hormone of love; endorphins, hormones of transcendence, pleasure, natural pain killers; adrenaline and noradrenaline, hormones of excitement, fight or flight and finally prolactin, the hormone which produces milk. Each stage of childbirth highlights a different system which allows the body and mind to meet the challenges, excitements, lows and highs in energy. But if the hormones are triggered out of sequence it can create a very different birth experience. Let's say the hormone adrenaline is triggered in the first stage of childbirth, when mum is nervous about the sensations she is experiences and feeling perhaps a little anxious, this can actually slow down or even stop the process. This happens so that we can protect ourselves in times of danger and can run away and find somewhere safe to birth our baby. We actually need adrenalin in the second stage of childbirth, when we know baby is on the way and about to be born; it gives us that zing of energy to see everything through. In creating the right space to welcome our child into the world we can give our hormones every opportunity to do what they do best.

So far I have described childbirth as a delicate dance of hormones between mum and her baby and like any good production the right environment has to be created so the choreography can unfold. The rational brain needs to calm down and mum shouldn't be thinking so much. Her birth partner or doula can take on the role of helping her voice be heard or in helping her create the atmosphere she wants. It's sometimes difficult for a woman to imagine this happening, as often we want to control this experience, but control can come from our fears. If we are fully informed and fully prepared before the birth then we are also prepared for all eventualities that may happen. Attending good antenatal classes with your partner can help you learn new skills and increase your knowledge as well as develop practical skills that will not only help you in childbirth but in everyday life too.

For the flow of childbirth to happen more naturally a mum needs a space that is quiet and private. She is going to reveal some of the most vulnerable and tender parts of herself in the next hours. A good way to create that is with dim lighting, access to quality air, privacy and as little conversation as possible. It can be useful to have a sign on the door that asks for any person entering to be respectful and quiet and talk in a low tone. This will allow mum to move out of her rational brain and follow her own hormonal and genetic blueprint for birth. She can connect within herself to a place into a where she will intuitively choose the breathing, positions, and movements that will help her baby move through her in a dance of ecstasy. This is her baby's and her own birth right.

Any birth place you chose will have its benefits and disadvantages but with help and support from your health care professionals you can reach the choice that you are most comfortable with. If you are going to hospital you may have to travel to get there, there may be bad traffic and combined with the anxiety you may already be feeling you could trigger adrenaline. If you practice your breathing skills and mindfulness you may have a better opportunity to stay in the right balance. When you arrive at the hospital, trust your partner to be your voice so you can focus on yourself and your baby. Many hospitals now only do virtual tours which can be an added stress for you if you don't know what to expect when you are walking through the door. To help you feel more safe and aware you may want to

consider preparing a list of key questions which you can prepare you for the protocols of the hospital. For example:

- How do I know when to come to hospital? At what stage should my labour be?
- When I first arrive where do I go, where do I park and what doors should I use?
- Will the team of professionals be respectful and follow my birth plan as much as is possible?
- What will happen to me when I first arrive? Do I have any checks?
- If my care plan needs to change will we be part of the decision making?

Talk through your hopes and fears with your partner, midwife and antenatal teacher. Be informed and be prepared.

Here are some other ideas for you to consider to make the room more homely and hormonal if you decide not to have a homebirth

- A sign for the door (so remember blue tack) asking for people to enter quietly and respectfully.
 - Detailed birth plan – always good to have two copies, one for you and one for the midwife.
 - Take some time to organise or manage the space to suit you. You may want your birth partner to organise or move furniture so you have the space you need to move from position to position.
 - If you are in a hospital you may want to heighten or lower the bed to allow for different labour positions or put the bed mattress on the floor if it is comfortable for you.
 - Unpack your hospital bag so you have items to hand.
 - Temperature- make sure you have an environment where you have control over the windows and heating systems so you change them when you need to.
 - Lighting – can you dim the light? If you are at home you can have candles or a side light. Check with your birth place what lighting they have available and how you can adapt it.
 - Sound – would you like music or would you like to be restful and quite. You may consider having an MP3 player especially if you are in a shared environment.
 - Comfies – what do you have that will make you more comfortable? Pillows, quilt, blanket, sheet? Items that smell of your home and environment will help you feel safe in a new environment.
 - Feeling good – do you want to go nudie? Or do you want a long T shirt or nightdress to cover your bits and pieces? Make sure it smells of you and home.
 - Affirmation cards or affirmation playlist.
 - Birth position reminder – a poster or download on your phone to remind you but remember practice makes perfect.
 - Gym ball – to help you with different birth positions. Check if your place of birth has them or if you prefer your own then take your own in with you.
-
- Massage oil.

ALL CONTENT (filmed and written) of The Thoughtful Body™ and Mama's Pilates™© are under the Copyright of The Thoughtful Body™ and Mama's Pilates™© and the Intellectual Property of Rachel Rafiefar (unless otherwise stated). This document cannot be reproduced or copied without prior permission from the author Rachel Rafiefar.

- Tens machine.
- Distractions – laptop, books, games, DVDs. Do remember however that these can keep you in your rationale brain and don't help with you moving into an altered state but if things have slowed down and you need to learn to let go and relax again they can serve as a good distraction.
- Food snacks, energy bars, drinks. If you are at home ice cubes can help you keep hydrated and cool you down.
- Do you want student midwife or doctor in the room? Or do you want privacy?

Finally, I would like to finish with the inspiring words of Ina May Gaskin,

“ Wherever and whenever you intend to give birth, those experiences will impact your emotions, your mind, your body and your spirit for the rest of your life.”