

Childbirth without pain

By SUELLEN HINDE
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TARLI Semaan is one of the first Victorian women to give birth pain-free under hypnosis. The 29-year-old gave birth to her first child a fortnight ago, says it was "a fantastic experience". She says the hypnosis technique can help women experience drug and pain-free labour. For most people the word hypnosis conjures up images of a swinging pendant lulling you into a trance.

But "hypnobirthing" is not about inducing a trance. It is a combination of relaxation, breathing and positive thinking techniques that control labor and birthing pain. After strolling into the Mercy Hospital for Women at 6.30pm on June 3, Mrs Semaan gave birth to baby Elias, drug and scream free, in less than two hours.

"When it came time I would hypnotise myself between contractions," Mrs Semaan said. "I remember having this immense relaxation, so every time I had a contraction I could really push and that was why he came out so quickly, because of my focus."

At seven months pregnant Mrs Semaan started learning hypnosis under the tutelage of Dr John Levin and practised it every day to help her have a drug and pain-free birth.

"When I got pregnant, I had women saying to me, 'from your first contraction have an epidural, don't even wait for the pain, pump the drugs into you'," she said. "I didn't want that to be my experience, I wanted it to be natural. "That's when Dr Levin told my husband about hypnobirthing. "It is about the power of your mind and training your mind to believe birth can be pain free.

"Everyone loves telling you horror stories about stitches and pain, but I would say, 'No, I don't want to hear your horror stories'. "And by practising hypnosis, I reprogrammed my subconscious mind so that I was not scared of the delivery."

While women are agreeing to caesarians in record numbers, others are seeking alternatives such as birthing pools and hypnosis.

The Semaans say they are not "hippies" or "alternative lifestylers". Mr Semaan said many of their friends thought they were "crazy". "They would say, 'You're crazy, it's going to hurt; accept it and take the □drugs'," he said.

"So we got to the point that we stopped talking about it." The idea behind hypnobirthing is that the slow, smooth breathing and deep focus counteracts the fear-tension-pain syndrome.

Most women fear birth so their muscles tense up, resulting in pain. The Semaans said baby Elias, who weighed 3.3kg at birth, had put on 260gm in two weeks and breast feeding was easy.

"A stress-free birth means a stress-free child," Mrs Semaan said.



No pain: Tarli Semaan with son Elias, two weeks, who was delivered using hypnosis. Picture: Faith Nulley