

Alternative births

Three women tell us how they had different approaches to labour

Acupuncture

Lima O'Donnell, 33, lives in south London with husband Nick, 39, and their daughter Marguerite, 11 weeks

'Thirty-three hours after I'd first been induced I was still only 1cm dilated. I was 39 weeks pregnant, but the doctors had decided to induce me because my baby's growth had slowed. Three doses of prostaglandin pessaries had failed to accelerate labour and only left me with painful but ineffectual contractions.

'Doctors rarely break a woman's waters before she is 2cm dilated. They broke mine when I was only 1cm. The procedure was incredibly painful and didn't work.

'Facing the prospect of an epidural I was relieved to see Emma Cannon, my acupuncturist, arrive.

She'd treated me since my late 20s and was the first to pick up on problems with my fertility. I had a very high level of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) — a good measure of a woman's egg reserve. At the age of 30 I was told I might only have a few years left to start a family, so we started trying straight away, with

weekly acupuncture treatments to help lower my FSH levels. I conceived, but the pregnancy was ectopic. I had one of my fallopian tubes removed and then lost the use of the other one to infection. IVF was the only option. I continued to have acupuncture to assist the process and became pregnant on the first cycle.

'It was just after 5pm on the second day of my labour when Emma arrived. Exhausted and in pain, I was so relieved to see her. She gave me some powerful treatments to help with the progression of labour. She applied needles to several points

Acupuncture saved me from an epidural!

that correspond with the large intestine, spleen, bladder and liver. This combination can enhance contractions when labour fails to progress and it proved to be the key

turning point of my labour — within an hour I was experiencing effective contractions.

'I felt that I had regained control and, consequently, was more focused and energised. Emma also gave me a treatment to alleviate anxiety, which is believed to inhibit the release of birthing hormones. My fear lifted and I felt as if I was no longer fighting my body's wishes — I was going to meet my baby. The contractions started to become regular and more powerful, and continued through the night.

'There was a scary moment at about 3am when my baby's heart rate dropped so they had to put a scalp electrode on her head to check she was OK. I continued to dilate through the night and at about 7.30am I started to push. With my husband supporting me, it was an amazing, intense birth. Marguerite was born at 8.37am.

'My labour lasted for 50 hours but it was still a positive experience. I'm convinced that acupuncture played a vital part.'



BABY Marguerite Ros
WEIGHT AT BIRTH 7lb 2oz
BIRTH PLAN Spontaneous vaginal delivery in hospital
ACTUAL BIRTH Induced vaginal delivery in hospital

Belly dancing

Fiona Willis, 35, lives in Somerset with husband Gavin and their two daughters Liliith, three, and Tara, seven months

'When I was 41 weeks pregnant I was woken at around lam with my first contraction. They continued on and off until the next afternoon. I went for a walk to get some fresh air and things began to pick up. But, frustratingly, when I returned to the house they petered out again. I really wanted to keep things moving, so at about 4.30pm I decided to start dancing.

'I fell in love with belly dancing as a teenager — it felt so beautiful, so earthy and so womanly. When I trained as a shiatsu practitioner I'd studied the benefits of belly dancing during pregnancy and labour.

'Belly dancing originated in the Middle East as a dance performed from girlhood to prepare the body for having children. By honing the whole pelvic area and keeping the core muscles strong, it's a fantastic way of preparing for childbirth.

'When I moved from Essex to Somerset I set up a Birth Dance class. I kept teaching until I was eight months pregnant with my second baby. Belly dancing when you're

pregnant is just fantastic — the dance really deserves the name then! My baby always went quite still when I danced and I felt almost as if I was massaging her.

'During my labour I circled my hips, to connect with the baby and encourage her along. Then I did some shimmies to help nestle her deeper into the pelvis. The shimmy is a move that women often involuntarily make during labour and it seemed to encourage my womb to produce contractions that were more intense and effective. It really gave me the kick-start I needed.

'It felt fantastic to finally be active and involved in the birth, rather than just waiting for it to happen. I got a sudden injection of energy and my spirits were

lifted as my husband started drumming and I circled my hips to the beat.

'I still didn't think I was in active labour, but when

the midwife arrived at around 6.30pm I was 4cm dilated. After that, things really got going. I continued to dance through each contraction, working with my body to make each one more effective — it really helped relieve the pain, too. Within two hours I was fully dilated. My husband Gavin massaged me with the shiatsu techniques I'd shown him, which was fantastic. They helped me manage the

'I belly-danced my baby out'



BABY Tara
WEIGHT AT BIRTH 9lb 4oz
BIRTH PLAN Home birth (day outside)
ACTUAL BIRTH Home birth inside (it was too cold in the garden!)

pain, as well as giving him something constructive to do.

'I was up and down the stairs to go to the toilet frequently and it was on one of these trips that I felt my baby was going to make an appearance — and soon. When I got back downstairs, I got in to the birthing pool and just 40 minutes later Tara was born, weighing a healthy 9lb 4oz. She emerged after only three contractions and swam to the surface like a little fish. It was beautiful — I was kneeling in the pool so I just reached in and brought her to the surface. It was a memory I will treasure forever.

'Gavin remarked that it was a textbook hippy birth — complete with candles, music, belly dance and water. It was perfect and everything I'd always wanted.'

it for you?

Cathy Moore, a certified nurse midwife and a member of The Goddess Dancing belly dance troupe, explains:

'Belly dance is excellent for counteracting many of the common discomforts associated with pregnancy, especially in the last trimester. The hip and torso movements exercise the muscles of the abdomen and strengthen the pelvic floor, improving flexibility for labour.

'In the first stage of labour, the shapes of the slower belly dance — moving the hips and pelvis in circles and crescents — disperse the pain and help the baby to the optimal position for entering the bony pelvis. In the second stage, the floor positions used towards the climax of a dance are ideal birthing positions.

'Belly dance is an ancient dance form rooted in childbirth that offers many benefits for contemporary women seeking to reclaim power during this significant rite of passage:

• For more information about belly dance, visit inthebellyofthegoddess.com.



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on, a qualified acupuncturist and member of the Acupuncture for Childbirth Team (ACT), explains:

Acupuncture can be used from 36 weeks to prepare the body for labour. It can ripen the cervix, help the baby achieve the best position for birth and promote optimal energy for the mum-to-be.

'During labour, acupuncture can be used for pain relief and to alleviate fear. When you're scared, your body produces adrenaline, which inhibits the release of birthing hormones, slowing down the progress of the birth. Acupuncture counteracts the effects of adrenaline and can give you more confidence.

An Australian study showed that when pregnant women received acupuncture there was a 31% reduction in epidurals and a 32% reduction in emergency caesareans:

• To find a qualified acupuncturist in your area, visit acupuncture.org.uk.