

# Serenity Birthing – Your Birth and Beyond, The Way that Resonates With You



# Module 2 – All about Labour



# Module 2 – What you will encounter

- ♥ Birth is a physiological event – What this means
- ♥ The hormones of birth – Oxytocin, Endorphins, Prostaglandin, Relaxin, Prolactin, Adrenaline
- ♥ The path to birth – The stages of labour and what to expect
- ♥ Anatomy to help you understand what is happening in labour and why
- ♥ Instinctive birthing and the emotional phases of birth
- ♥ When should I go to hospital
- ♥ Unnecessary causes of pain in labour



# Birth is Physiological Event



Other physiological processes include expelling waste, sneezing, coughing.



The uterus and cervix are sphincter muscles. Sphincters have some characteristics in common:

- They work best somewhere private, quiet and calm (would you be able to poo easily in an unlocked public toilet?)
- They cannot open at will. They do not respond to commands like “push” or “relax”
- Sphincters involuntarily close if the person feels frightened, embarrassed, interrupted or self-conscious
- When a person is stressed, the sphincter muscles can also tense. This can reduce blood flow to the baby in labour
- Relaxing your mouth and jaw correlate to relaxation of the sphincter muscles of the vagina and anus – laugh..Low moaning sounds also work well (ever laughed so much you have wet yourself?)



# The hormones of birth

- ♥ All of the hormones need to be released in order for labour to progress effectively
- ♥ Hormone release is also hugely important for bonding and the establishment and success of breastfeeding
- ♥ Release of hormones requires shutting down of the neo-cortex so the primitive brain is free to do what it needs to do



# Birth Hormones – Oxytocin

*Oxytocin* – quick birth – hormone of love - effects are cumulative and build during labour

Receptors in the cervix, birth canal, perineum, vagina, nipples and skin all increase production (why massage and nipple stimulation and cuddling can be helpful during labour). The oxytocin causes contraction, release of endorphins and helps you to go into an altered state, shutting down the neo-cortex, allowing your body to take control. At the moment of birth, if undisturbed, huge oxytocin levels facilitate you “falling in love” and begin milk production, contract your uterus back down.

- Overstimulation of the neocortex e.g answering questions, talking, filling in forms, analysing, medical interventions can make oxytocin shy. If your natural flow is disturbed, we need you to follow your instinct to get back to your natural path as quickly as possible



# Birth Hormones – Endorphins

**Endorphins** – the body's natural painkillers/opiates – released during exercise (such as that of your uterus contracting). Oxytocin flow triggers endorphin flow. They gradually increase as labour progresses. Sensations are naturally numbed. Massage can increase their release.

- Natural painkillers produced in response to the hard work of your uterus
- They create a sense of well-being and promote positive feelings
- They offer a natural reward for the effort required to give birth
- They keep the blood vessels of the body open and blood flow moving well



# Birth Hormones – Prostaglandin

**Prostaglandin** – Helps the cervix to soften and spread out

The body produces this in the weeks leading up to the birth (semen is a natural carrier of prostaglandin so lovemaking can help to soften the cervix)





# Birth Hormones – Relaxin

**Relaxin** – Makes ligaments, muscles & tissues soft, supple and stretchy

Secreted during pregnancy and building towards birth. Softening and relaxing the ligaments of the pelvis and perineum and the cervix. Breathing plenty of oxygen and staying relaxed leads to higher levels of relaxin which softens the birth canal allowing the baby to pass through smoothly



# Birth Hormones – Prolactin

**Prolactin** – The mothering hormone

This optimises maternal behaviours and prepares the breasts for milk production. It is important for bonding and recognising cues in your baby and peaks in the first hour after birth during that important skin to skin time



# Birth Hormones – Adrenaline

*Adrenaline* – the hormone of excitement and protection – fight or flight

Adrenaline is naturally released at certain points in the labour to allow for flight or flight if needed before you enter the next phase. Too much adrenaline suppresses oxytocin production and diverts blood flow away from the uterus.

It can stop labour...

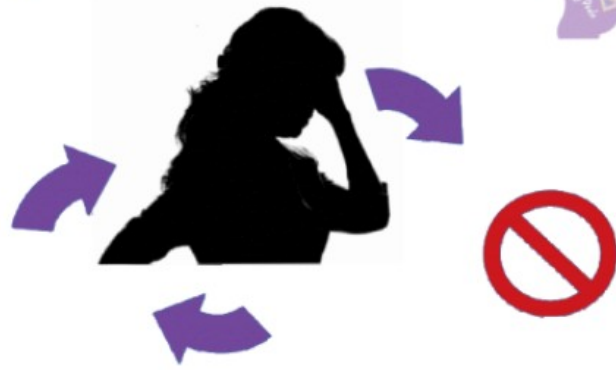


# Birth Physiology

Adrenaline – Fight or flight  
Blocks the production of  
Oxytocin and Beta-  
Endorphins



Fear  
Interruption



A woman NEEDS to feel SAFE to give birth

Oxytocin –  
quick birth

Supported



Beta-Endorphins  
natural pain relief  
(the morphine within)



# Try to avoid stimulating the neo-cortex



Avoid talking and questioning



Try to avoid annoyances, bright lights, sounds, interruptions to your flow, too many people making you feel observed



Try to remain calm and focused on your breathing and relaxing



Trust your body. It knows how to birth



Adrenaline

INHIBITS

Oxytocin production



A mother MUST feel safe to give birth



# Oxytocin builds in a continuous cycle

- ♥ Quiet
- ♥ Calm – fewer people, not being constantly monitored and questioned
- ♥ Dim lighting
- ♥ Feeling loved and cared for
- ♥ Touch that makes you feel loved e.g hug, massage, gentle stroking
- ♥ Nipple stimulation can boost oxytocin
- ♥ Keeping warm and cosy
- ♥ Keeping snacks like chocolate and keeping hydrated – sips of water and nibbles of food
- ♥ Treat it like bed time – feel comfy and cosy and sleepy and relaxed





# Birth Anatomy

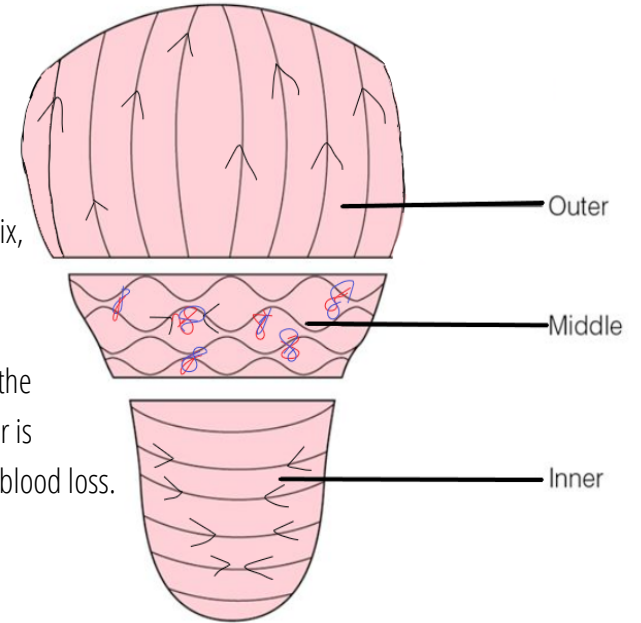
## Uterine Structure

The outer muscles pull up on the inner circular layers which are holding the cervix closed. As the circular muscles relax, the outer layers pull the cervix forward and up, opening the cervix so that the baby can be born.

Once the cervix is open, the nature of the movement changes to one of pushing the baby downwards through the open cervix, pelvic bowl and vagina so the baby can be born.

When the middle layer contracts, it can constrict the blood vessels. This naturally occurs in labour and is one of the reasons the baby's heartbeat can change during a contraction. As the muscles relax, the heart rate returns to normal. This muscular layer is important after your baby is born and when the placenta detaches as it contracts to constrict the blood flow to help prevent blood loss.

Oxytocin helps these muscles to work in harmony to birth your baby. The more oxytocin you have, the more the muscles can function well. This is why it is so important to keep your oxytocin flowing!



# The muscles of the Uterus

- ♥ The uterine muscles are big and strong. When they contract you can feel a tightening and sometimes an intense feeling like the heat you feel in muscles held working for a while, like your thighs when you are holding a squat
- ♥ If everything around the uterus is relaxed and calm, the muscles can work and move more freely and discomfort is reduced and labour is quicker. Like a tug of war, if there is no one opposing the pull, the team will win quickly. If there is tension on the other side, the battle will be long, challenging and tiring with much back and forth!



# Nature is designed to be successful

- ♥ Unlike running a marathon, bodies are designed to give us a rest between contractions. Your uterus tends to contract only for around one minute followed by a few minutes rest between each one
- ♥ The movements in the muscles slowly and gradually build. They warm up before labour even starts and increase in intensity as labour progresses to give your body time to adapt and adjust



# The Path to Birth





# The Stages of Labour – Latent Phase

The latent phase - moving, softening and dilation of your cervix:

- ♥ The cervix begins to move forward and soften – Effacement and thinning
- ♥ The mucus plug inside the cervix may come away together with some blood – bloody show. It is common to have more vaginal discharge in the lead up to birth
- ♥ The membranes around the baby may release – waters breaking or spontaneous rupture of membranes
- ♥ The uterine muscles will contract regularly in order to pull the cervix open and begin to move the baby down.
- ♥ This phase can take a while so distract yourself, rest, stay at home (you won't be considered in labour by midwives until you are 3-4cm dilated)



# The Stages of Labour – Phase 1

*The 1<sup>st</sup> stage* – This is established labour

- ♥ The body releases adrenaline to signal you are moving into established labour
- ♥ It is slightly up-hill at this point due to a decrease in endorphins – sensations may become more intense
- ♥ Your body goes into 'auto pilot' and you're in the flow to labour land/planet birth
- ♥ Contractions are around 4-5 in a 10 minute period
- ♥ The long muscles of the uterus are drawing the cervix up and open and smoothing out the concertina like ridges of the birth canal



# The Stages of Labour – Stage 2...

The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage – The birth of your baby

- ♥ The cervix is now fully open to allow the baby to descend through the pelvis and vagina – that nature of the contractions changes – this often feels good
- ♥ You may have a pause in contractions here the “rest and be thankful” phase
- ♥ The pelvic floor and vagina gradually stretch to allow the baby out – as the baby descends, the tissues accommodate the movement – The baby comes down a little with each contraction and then may go back up



# ...The Stages of Labour – Stage 2

The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage – The birth of your baby

- ♥ As the baby descends through the birth canal, the usually strong and rippled pelvic floor muscles fan out and cover a wider area to allow space as the baby is emerging
- ♥ The pelvic bones also open and widen – especially in upright/squatting positions
- ♥ These processes are aided by the relaxin hormone present in your body
- ♥ The pressure of the baby's head on the perineum reduces the circulation, providing a numbing effect
- ♥ The bones of the baby's skull are designed to overlap and form an oval shape to fit through the vaginal opening
- ♥ The baby's head and body are born – breathe your baby out rather than “pushing”





# The Stages of labour - Stage 3

The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage - The birth of the placenta and membranes

- ♥ Once your baby has been born, the uterus will immediately begin to contract back down to it's natural small pear shape and the placenta will detach from the uterine wall as the blood vessels connecting it get cut off by the contraction of the middle muscular layer
- ♥ The uterus will contract itself back down to limit blood loss from the site of the placenta and the placenta will be gently expelled
- ♥ Your uterus will continue to gently contract over several days/weeks, shrinking back down so don't be alarmed if your abdomen looks large for a while still after birth



With the right cocktail of hormones and the right physical and emotional state of the mother, the long muscles of the uterus pull open the round muscles until the passage way is large enough for the baby to slip down and out of the woman's body



The muscles of the uterus will work for you, no matter what you do.

You would still give birth if you were unconscious or in a coma!

So try to relax and enjoy the amazing ride



# Instinctive Birthing

- ♥ Giving birth is hard work
- ♥ Giving birth is intense
- ♥ You are likely to feel strong sensations in your uterus
- ♥ There may be times when you wonder if you can cope

... But if you go in prepared, knowing what to expect and why certain sensations are happening, you may finish tired but you will be able to enjoy the process much more, just like running a race



When all the birthing hormones are present  
the body will go through every detailed stage  
of labour without the need for anything  
outside the body



# The Emotional Phases of Birth

🌈 Phase 1 - The excitement phase

🌈 Phase 2 – The serious phase

🌈 Phase 3 – The self doubt phase



# Phase 1 – The excitement phase

- ♥ Regular tightenings lasting 30-45 seconds
- ♥ In this time try to rest, carry on as normal, perhaps plan something special just for this time e.g. baking a birthing cake
- ♥ Relax and pause what you are doing if necessary – breathe steadily and deeply allowing your abdomen and body to remain loose and floppy
- ♥ The baby is getting into position, your cervix is softening and being pulled up into the uterus before it can begin to open
- ♥ This stage can be long so rest and sleep if you can, you can even have a drink to relax
- ♥ DO NOT go to the hospital too soon – it can demoralise you, slow your labour and lead to further intervention



# During the excitement phase

- 💖 Every movement in your body is moving you closer to birthing your baby. Every tightening, every pause to rest
- 💖 Everything is happening for a reason
- 💖 Trust and believe your body is moving, shifting, softening, tightening, relaxing for a reason – getting your cervix open ready to release your baby





# Phase 2 – The Serious Phase

- ♥ Active labour – there are a few hurdles in the road
- ♥ Excitement moves aside for concentration
- ♥ Contractions will likely last 45-60 seconds 3-5mins apart
- ♥ You will likely feel the need to rest/lie down between contractions and move into a comfortable position for the contraction itself
- ♥ These are good, strong, effective contractions



# During the Serious Phase

- ♥ Concentrate on your breathing, use your coping strategies such as relaxation and visualisation techniques
- ♥ You will not want to be disturbed
- ♥ The more you allow your body to get on with what it needs to do the better
- ♥ Your needs may change rapidly in this phase
- ♥ Birth companions MUST be there for you, whatever that means in the moment and accept it may change frequently
- ♥ You will become focused and determined like never before in an amazing way
- ♥ Don't go to the hospital too soon – This phase can last 4-8 hours
- ♥ If you can still smile for a photo, it isn't yet time to go to the hospital!
- ♥ Get primal – create a quiet, dark, warm, safe space



# When do I go to hospital?

- ♥️ Wait until your contractions are 60-90 seconds in duration and every 3 mins
- ♥️ Your face is continually flushed
- ♥️ You begin vomiting, shaking or having hiccups
- ♥️ You have more bloody show, feel rectal pressure or a pushing instinct (go immediately or call the midwife team for advice)



# Phase 3 – The Self Doubt Phase

- 💖 Self doubt phases usually occur in short peaks when your adrenaline peaks
- 💖 They are a NORMAL part of labour that means you are progressing well
- 💖 Your body will save a burst of energy for the last few cm of dilation  
between 7-10cm dilation the contractions are usually more intense
- 💖 You may feel: “I can’t do this!” “I need help” “I want to go home” “Get this baby out of me!” “I need pain relief”
- 💖 You may have outward signs of physical exertion like hot/cold flushes, shaking, nausea, vomiting. These signs are ALL NORMAL physical responses to the hard work your body is doing
- 💖 Really try to relax, focus on the present moment, practice slow, long breaths and keep your body limp



# During the Self Doubt Phase

- ♥ You are experiencing a sensation within your body that you CAN work with
- ♥ The powerful sensations cannot “overpower” you because they are a part of you. Working to birth your baby
- ♥ It is intense, hard, challenging but can also be incredible and truly awesome!
- ♥ Your companions are your cheerleaders – they can encourage and praise you, let you know that your baby is coming soon
- ♥ This is the time to wait and focus and hold off intervention
- ♥ Once the urge to push comes then the self-doubt will go and you will feel energised and determined



# Causes of unnecessary pain in labour

1. Tension
2. Paying attention too soon
3. Lack of sleep
4. Thirst
5. Hunger
6. Need to urinate
7. Performance anxiety
8. Lying on your back



# Tension

- ♥ When you feel pain, do you automatically tense up?
- ♥ If you accidentally bump yourself, focus on going limp and relaxed instead of being tense. Notice what happens to your pain level..
- ♥ Breathe through the pain instead of tensing up, with each breath, focus on going floppy and relaxed, notice how much easier this feels
- ♥ Relax and breathe nice slow deep breaths



# Paying Attention Too Soon

- ♥ It is easy to become obsessed with timing contractions from the very first one
- ♥ Don't waste your energy by paying attention too early
- ♥ If they wake you in the middle of the night, try to go back to sleep or relax and do some mindfulness exercises to reserve your energy
- ♥ If you can talk through a contraction, they are likely just starting to thin and move your cervix forward. This process can take some time. So, try to ignore them and do something you enjoy like watching a film, seeing friends, going for a walk, baking
- ♥ In many cultures, women continue to work and keep active right up to the point where they are actually giving birth. Distraction is a wonderful thing!





# Lack of Sleep

- 💖 A tired body is less able to deal with labour, causing everything to "feel" more, so, be sure to get plenty of rest in the days leading up to your labour
- 💖 Use the early mild contractions to get some sleep or if you can't sleep, rest with a relaxation track or music



# Thirst

- ♥ If you do not take sips of water or juice between your contractions, you stand a good chance of becoming dehydrated
- ♥ When your body is dehydrated, your muscle output is decreased by 30%! Your Uterus is the biggest muscle in your body and you need it to be working at its best!
- ♥ Dehydration also heightens feelings of exhaustion and can elevate your temperature which can lead midwives to feel concerned about fever and need for antibiotics which are best avoided unless absolutely necessary



# Hunger

- ♥ Your body uses food as its energy source, labour is intense exercise for your uterus
- ♥ If you are not eating during labour, you are depriving your body of energy it needs to labour
- ♥ No one should stop you from eating
- ♥ Little bites between contractions of energy dense foods such as protein energy bars, bananas, nuts can be beneficial to keep your energy stores topped up



# Need to Urinate

- ♥ During active labour, you may not be able to distinguish the need to urinate
- ♥ Your uterus will put pressure on your bladder as it contracts which can increase discomfort
- ♥ The best way to prevent pain from an over-full bladder is to urinate frequently (at least every two hours)
- ♥ A full bladder can get in the way when the baby is descending through the pelvis, so emptying it regularly clears the way for the baby to come out



# Performance Anxiety

- ♥ Counting contractions and going to the hospital too soon can cause anxiety
- ♥ Being in the hospital too early can make the labour seem slower than if you had stayed at home and busied yourself with your life
- ♥ Having nurses and doctors checking on you can make the "seeming slow" labour seem even slower, causing the mum to feel that she has to perform better, that labour must get moving.... This anxiety can be enough to send some women into the fear/tension/pain cycle
- ♥ So, stay where you are comfortable, in your own safe space and have fun things to do for as long as possible



# Lying on Your Back

- ♥ When you are on your back, the contracting uterus has to move "up" against gravity, which is much more work than simply moving forward
- ♥ You can constrict the blood flow to your heart, causing you to be light-headed (this can also compromise blood flow to the baby)
- ♥ Your sacrum needs to be able to move during labour to allow the baby space to pass through if you are on your back, putting pressure on the sacrum, this can be uncomfortable
- ♥ Staying off your back can help in preventing labour pain – Use gravity to help you in more upright positions allowing your pelvis and sacrum space to move to accommodate the birth of your baby



# Practical Exercise

- ♥ Take some time to practice deep, relaxed breathing and making all of your muscles relax and go floppy
- ♥ “Practice with a pinch” With a friend or your birth companion, practice your deep breathing and relaxing and going floppy as they gradually increase the pressure of a pinch somewhere on your body e.g. arm or leg, practice also tensing up. See which one makes it easier to cope with the sensations to prove to yourself what a massive difference relaxing and deeply, rhythmically breathing can make to your perception of the discomfort
- ♥ Keep writing down your thoughts and feelings in your diary and any questions that may have been brought up during this module

