

# *Releasing Fear*

6 Things You Need To Know To  
Release The Fear Of Birth



# The way you feel during your birth experience matters...

While many mothers-to-be find it easy to be excited about the arrival of their baby, it can be difficult not to feel apprehensive or even fearful about the day of birth itself. It is not surprising when you consider the 'Hollywood' version of birth showing a screaming woman on her back, completely powerless and at the mercy of her care providers. Birth doesn't have to be this way. The first thing we need to do is uninstall these ideas of birth and begin to release our fears.

This guide has been intentionally designed to give you the knowledge and practical tools to begin to identify, prepare for and let go of whatever is making you feel uneasy about your baby's 'birth day'.

*"There is a secret in our culture, and it's not that birth is painful. It's that women are strong."*

— *Laura Stavoe Harm*

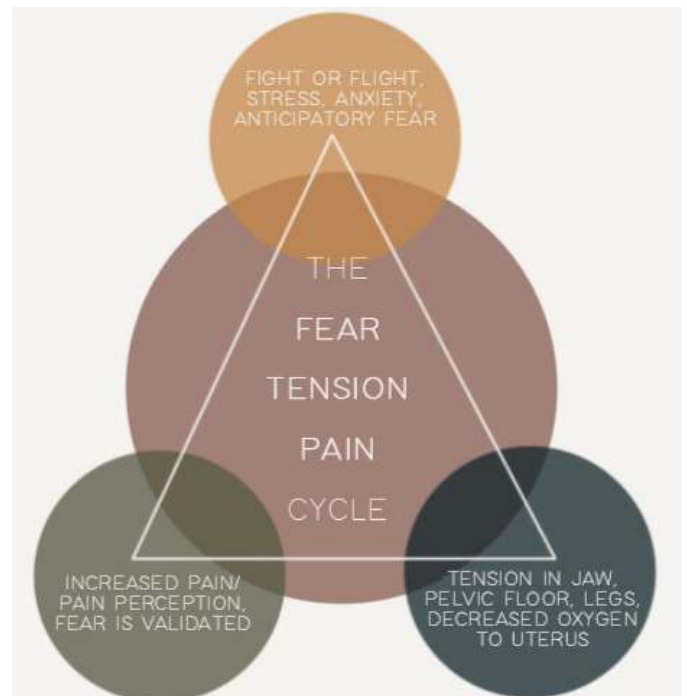
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## The Fear Tension Pain Cycle

The Fear Tension Pain Cycle is a phrase coined by Grantley Dick-Read in the 1920's. It refers to how a mother's experience of fear triggers the muscles in the body to tense up and as a result increases the sensations of pain experienced during birth. As you experience more pain, you experience more fear and the cycle continues.

Later studies conducted in the 1980's confirmed that if a mother felt anxiety or fear leading up to and during her birth experience, she was likely to report higher levels of pain. This can be accredited to an activated 'fight or flight' response. In these circumstances, the mother had released an elevated amount of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol.

The increase of these hormones in the body can have detrimental effects on the labouring mother. Firstly, her muscles will tighten. This is particularly an issue for the pelvic floor, the muscle group the baby must pass through on its way out of the vagina. If the pelvic floor is tense, more pain is experienced as the baby passes through the birth canal. There is also a greater risk of physical trauma occurring to the area due to the muscles being resistant. In addition to this, stress hormones slow down and reduce the efficiency of uterine contractions. This can prolong or even shut down labour. If this were to occur, there is a much greater chance of medical intervention. While this may sound overwhelming or even inevitable, you can overcome it with intentional preparation.



## Having A Support Person

Having a support person may seem like an obvious step. And it may seem logical that the role belongs to your partner. But what does it mean to be a support person? It's more than just someone to drive you to the hospital or hold your hand during contractions. Your support person needs to be informed about your preferred birth plan and be willing to speak up on your behalf if plans change. They also may need to remind you of why you made certain plans in the first place as you progress through your labour and start to doubt yourself. This can be overwhelming for first time birthing partners who are usually just doing their best to stay focused on you.

For this reason, some women hire a doula to support them through the birth preparation and labour experience. A doula is a trained support person who will aid you physically and emotionally throughout the birthing process. They are not a medical professional, however, they are knowledgeable about the obstetric procedures that may be offered to you during birth and can help you make decisions about your birth plan and on the day.

## What Do They Need To Know?

Whether your support person is your partner, a friend or family member or a doula, there are a few things you will need them to know so they can do their best to support you on you big day:

1. Go through your birth plan together. Ensure they understand all of your requests.
2. Talk through your 'what ifs'. Make sure they are aware of the contingency plans you are ok with.
3. Be sure they 100% back you in your decisions. If they don't, you may need to ask someone else to step into that role. You will likely find it hard to feel supported on the day if you don't trust they will follow your plan.
4. Go over the **BRAIN** decision making process with them on the next page.

## Fear Of The Unknown

They say knowledge is power. When it comes to giving birth, knowledge means you can make empowering decisions. Unfortunately, when you are in labour it's usually too late to start researching the different approaches to the many interventions you may be offered. Add on top of this the fact that you will most likely be trying your best just to stay focused on the birth of your baby, not knowing how to proceed can be incredibly fear inducing.

This may be when your birth partner or support person can step in on your behalf. Most likely you will have a birth plan which your partner will be familiar with, however, deciding what to do if things deviate from the plan can be nerve wracking for them, especially when you are in pain or under pressure to make a decision.

## Using Your BRIAN

There is a simple way to overcome this problem. It comes down to knowing what questions to ask. Use the **BRAIN** acronym below to simplify the decision making process:

- **Benefits:** what are the benefits of the procedure being offered?
- **Risks:** are there any risks associated with the procedure?
- **Alternatives:** are there other procedures we could choose from if this one doesn't feel right?
- **Instinct:** what does your gut instinct tell you?
- **Nothing:** what happens if we do nothing and wait a few hours to see how you naturally progress?

Asking these simple questions will give you the information you need to proceed without overloading you with unnecessary jargon. It is important to keep in mind, that while your care provider is definitely the authority on the topic, they are not the authority over your decision making. They may have a preferred way of doing things or be on a schedule that doesn't suit you. It is ok to ask them to wait if there is no immediate risk to you and your baby.

## What Are You Afraid Of?

It is difficult to release our fears if we don't know what they are. One important step in becoming comfortable with birth, is to sit alone and do a self-reflection around what it is you fear. Once you can identify your fears, you will be able to begin the process of acknowledging and acting on your needs in the areas of concern.

## A Personal Reflection

Use the following questions as a reflection activity. You might like to use a journal to record your answers.

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about birth?
2. Do you feel prepared for birth? If not, what's missing?
3. If you are planning a hospital birth, what do you associate hospitals with? Does this impact your feelings about birth?
4. No matter what type of birth you are planning (vaginal or cesarean), do you feel you can handle the physical process and recovery?
5. What is your perception of the pain associated with birth? Do you feel you have enough information regarding pain medication and the interventions that may be offered to you to make informed decisions about their effects on you and your baby?
6. Spend some time intentionally visualising your birth. What comes up for you?

It is important to be completely honest with yourself when answering these questions. Once you are done, reflect on what you need to feel safe around these fears. Is it more information? Knowing your support person has your back 100%? Building trust in your mental and physical capacity to give birth? This will look different for everyone. Now you have a basis from which you can start actioning things to empower yourself through birth.

## The Power Of Breath

Have you tried a breathing practice before and found it hasn't worked for you? Trust me, I know the feeling! The thing is, it doesn't work to its full potential if you don't practice it regularly. Like all things worth doing, it must be done repetitively and over a period of time to reap the benefits. It's like going to the gym to build your core strength, would wouldn't go once and expect abs! You need to integrate a breathing practice into your daily routine for it to support your nervous system.

You may also think 'I breathe all day every day', how is practising going to help me? Intentional breathing with an even inhale and exhale works in a very soothing way to send a message from the lungs to the central nervous system. This activates a sense of calm which spreads to the rest of the body and mind. And the more you do it, the stronger its effects will be. When practiced regularly, it will naturally reverse the effects of an activated 'fight or flight' response.

## Putting It In Practice

When you are pregnant, the bigger your baby gets, the smaller your lung capacity becomes. This means we begin to shorten our breath and reduce the quality of our breathing without even noticing. So you may need to shorten the length of your breath when you first start the practice below. As you get more comfortable, you can lengthen your breath.

### **Traffic Light Breathing:**

- Each time you are stopped at a red light start your breathing practice.
- Take a slow inhale, through the nose if possible, for 3 seconds.
- Exhale through the nose for 3 seconds without holding.
- If 3 seconds feels comfortable, extend your breath to 4 seconds and then 5 seconds.
- Continue until the lights turn green and return to normal breathing.

## Mediation and Visualisation

As you are probably aware, mindfulness has become a buzzword in the realm of pregnancy and motherhood and with good reason. Having a meditation practice leading up to the birth of your baby has been proven to help reduce anxiety, depression and perceived stress. Still not sold on giving it a go? It can also help to improve immune function and relax those tight muscles that are holding on to your tension. All of which will build your internal strength and help you overcome any fears you may be harbouring around your birth experience.

You may be under the impression that meditation means you must empty your mind. This is a common misperception and can become a roadblock for people who are interested in the benefits but don't believe they are able to do it. Meditation is actually just a practice of focus. Some meditation practices might be focusing on an empty mind, while others may intentionally give your mind something to follow and think about. The common theme for meditation is simply staying focussed on one thing. If you have stray thoughts, this is normal. Acknowledge them and let them pass instead of getting caught up in a thought spiral. Simply bring your attention back to the original focus.

## Putting It In Practice

- Begin by finding a comfortable place to sit or lie where you can be undisturbed for 10 minutes.
- Close your eyes, place your hands on your belly and begin practicing the same breath you would use in the Traffic Light Breathing activity. Do this for 5 or 6 rounds while counting the breath.
- Once you are settled, imagine holding your baby for the first time.
- Take your time to visualise every detail of their face. Imagine their tiny finger wrapping around yours. Feel the softness of their skin against yours. Maybe you can feel the gentleness of their breath blowing against your hand. Breathe in their new baby smell, savouring it. Hear the little mewling sounds of a newborn. Feel the love you have for this tiny life blossoming inside your chest.
- When you are ready, gently bring your attention back to room you are in and open your eyes.

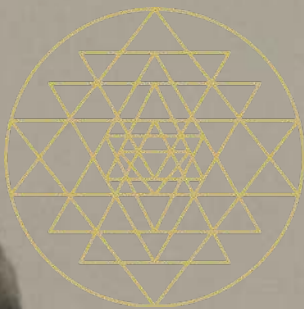


# *A Little Bit About The Author*

Hello lovely mummies-to-be! My name is Jessica Perryman. I am so honoured that you have allowed me to share some of my learnings with you on your birth journey. I am a pre and post natal yoga teacher and counsellor who is passionate about empowering women through birth.

I was very naive during my first pregnancy and quite happy being that way. The less I had to think about it, the better. I went to my first antenatal class at 32 weeks pregnant and that where I learnt that I didn't have to give birth on my back and I could treat birth as a rite of passage instead of something to fear.

From here I began to educate myself around how I could make the birth of my daughter an empowering experience instead of a traumatising one. And now my mission is to share that information with as many women as possible. So I founded TEMPLE Wellness and Yoga as a way to connect with women who want to be empowered by birth.



TEMPLE  
Wellness and Yoga