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Hypnobirthing as a way to give natural birth What is the current evidence

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Η εφαρμογή της ύπνωσης στη διάρκεια
του τοκετού (hypnobirthing) ως μέθοδος φυσικού
τοκετού: Σύγχρονα βιβλιογραφικά δεδομένα

Περίληψη στο τέλος του άρθρου

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The term “natural birth” is not new, but it was first introduced in the literature by the British Obstetrician Dr Grantly Dick-Read in the 1930’s. He referred to “natural birth” as giving birth without any medical intervention that would otherwise disturb the sequence of labour and especially pain relief in the form of anaesthesia.¹ A decade later in 1947, he highlighted that the root cause of pain during the childbirth process is fear, as fear leads to stress, which is indirectly linked with pain. He described the cyclical “fear-tension-pain” model, where high levels of maternal fear lead to increased muscular tension, causing increased pain which in turn further aggravates the woman’s level of fear.² Following this seminal and influential theoretical contribution of Dick-Read to the literature on the effect of psychological factors in labour, there have been several studies ever since that have corroborated this theoretical model. There is now evidence that by reducing the fear of labour then the pain experienced during labour is decreased, the level of satisfaction with labour increases, and the birthing outcomes are improved.^{3–5}

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There are many childbirth education programs that have incorporated this theoretical model of Dick-Read which seek to reduce maternal anxiety, increase confidence and facilitate the birthing process. One such antenatal education program is the hypnosis-oriented program developed in 1989, otherwise known as the hypnobirthing program.⁶ Since this initial report, there have been several other antenatal preparation programs developed in the literature that use hypnosis as a means of coping with the experience of labour and birth, which are collectively known as hypnobirthing.⁷

The American Psychological Society in 2014 defined hypnosis as a “state of consciousness with focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness that is characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestions”.⁸ These suggestions are verbal and non-verbal communications that change the way women experience and perceive themselves and their environment and may influence their sensations, thought, mood or behaviour. Hypnobirthing focuses on preparing a woman for birth by reframing her perception of labour from a painful experience to a positive and transformative one. Women are taught different relaxation techniques, and practice the use of guided imagery and visualizations on birthing, along with how to be less aware of external stimuli so as to be more relaxed and comfortable, more confident, with less anxiety and fear.⁴ Pregnant women can be guided into hypnosis by a practitioner during labour or they can learn self-hypnosis during their antenatal preparation classes.

It has been reported that approximately 37% of pregnant women in the United States of America (USA) use non-pharmacological methods of pain management with hypnosis being the most popular.⁹ There is evidence that hypnobirthing facilitates a natural birth as it leads to less medical interventions during labour and results to higher vaginal birth rates.^{6,10,11} Hypnosis during labour has also been found to shorten the first stage of labour,^{5,10} with a better birthing experience and fewer days of postpartum hospitalization for women.^{4,11} Systematic reviews have found

that the use of hypnosis may reduce the need of pharmacological pain relief or analgesia by approximately 30% to 50%,^{4,11} whereas it decreased the need for an epidural by 70%.¹¹ It has been quoted that hypnosis has been utilized effectively where epidural analgesia is contraindicated, and it has been claimed to block all subjective perceptions of pain during labour in up to 25% of parturients.¹² In addition, hypnobirthing has been found to result in higher Apgar scores of the neonates at 5 minutes in comparison to the control groups.^{11,13} Furthermore, hypnobirthing has been demonstrated to be not only a clinically-effective tool to promote a natural birth, but is also a cost-effective tool since it has been found to reduce the cost of labour.⁵

The use of hypnosis for analgesia, otherwise known as hypnotic analgesia, has been described not only during labour and childbirth but has been used and studied extensively across a range of other clinical settings, such as in the case of burns treatment and other invasive medical or surgical procedures.⁴ In the case of hypnobirthing, it has been suggested that the nerve transmissions of pain stimuli within the nervous system are not inhibited but do remain active, however the perception of pain is altered by the use of hypnosis. Through neuroimaging studies we have found that hypnotic analgesia is not a placebo effect but hypnosis results in actual neurophysiological and brain perfusion changes during hypnotic-induced analgesia.¹¹ Recent advances in neuroimaging with the use of positron emission tomography (PET) have demonstrated that higher cortical areas of the brain, such as the anterior cingulate gyrus, are altered by hypnotic modulation of pain.¹⁴ The suppression of neural activity in these areas appears to inhibit the emotional interpretation of sensations that is being experienced as pain.¹¹

The World Health Organization (WHO) in 1996 published a report about the definition of a “normal birth” stating that the aim of care in normal birth is to achieve a healthy mother and child with the least possible level of interventions and with use of non-pharmacological methods of labour pain management where possible.¹⁵ The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) from the United Kingdom in 2014 reported that women should not be prevented from using hypnosis for pain relief during childbirth should they wish to do so.¹⁶ A few years later, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) from USA in 2017 reported that the term “natural childbirth” refers to the many different ways of giving birth without using pain medication, but other natural ways to ease pain such as emotional support, birthing balls, use of water immersion, and hypnosis.¹⁷ These recommendations to use hypnobirthing as part of a natural birth process are supported

by the literature evidence, indicating that it is a clinically-effective and cost-effective tool to support normality at birth. Hypnobirthing can be used to promote relaxation during labour, to reframe the birthing experience from one of pain to achievement, and to increase the sense of control, empowerment and confidence in accomplishing a natural and undisturbed childbirth.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η εφαρμογή της ύπνωσης στη διάρκεια του τοκετού (hypnobirthing) ως μέθοδος φυσικού τοκετού: Σύγχρονα βιβλιογραφικά δεδομένα

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Αρχεία Ελληνικής Ιατρικής 2024, 41(2):279–281

Η εφαρμογή της ύπνωσης στη διάρκεια του τοκετού, γνωστή ως μέθοδος “hypnobirthing”, αποτελεί μια κλινικά και οικονομικά αποτελεσματική μέθοδο προαγωγής του φυσικού τοκετού χωρίς παρεμβάσεις και χωρίς φαρμακευτικές μορφές αναλγησίας. Η εφαρμογή της ύπνωσης στη διάρκεια του τοκετού είναι αρκετά διαδεδομένη στις ανεπτυγμένες χώρες και τα οφέλη της είναι επαρκώς τεκμηριωμένα στην επιστημονική βιβλιογραφία. Έχει βρεθεί ότι ελαττώνει την ανάγκη για επισκληρίδια αναλγησία και για άλλες μορφές φαρμακευτικής αναλγησίας, αυξάνει τα ποσοστά κοιλιακού τοκετού, ελαττώνει τις παρεμβάσεις στη διάρκεια του τοκετού, μειώνει τη χρονική διάρκεια του πρώτου σταδίου τοκετού, και αυξάνει τη θετική εμπειρία γέννας των γυναικών. Η μέθοδος hypnobirthing δεν αναστέλλει τα ερεθίσματα του πόνου στη διάρκεια του τοκετού, αλλά τροποποιεί την επεξεργασία τους στο κεντρικό νευρικό σύστημα. Νεότερες νευρο-απεικονιστικές μελέτες έχουν δείξει ότι η επίδραση της μεθόδου στη διάρκεια του τοκετού δεν αποτελεί φαινόμενο placebo, αλλά είναι αποτέλεσμα νευροφυσιολογικών μεταβολών στα κέντρα αισθητηριακής αντίληψης του πόνου. Η εφαρμογή της ύπνωσης στη διάρκεια του τοκετού οδηγεί σε ενδυνάμωση των γυναικών, σε αύξηση της αυτοπεποίθησής τους και σε καλύτερο έλεγχο του τοκετού τους, με καλύτερη περιγεννητική έκβαση σύμφωνα με τα σύγχρονα βιβλιογραφικά δεδομένα.

Λέξεις ευρητηρίου: Αναλγησία, Ασφάλεια, Εμπειρία τοκετού, Εφαρμογές της ύπνωσης στον τοκετό, Φυσικός τοκετός

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