



Fit Pregnancy

Summer 1996

Pregnant for the first time and wanting an unmedicated birth, I enrolled in a Lamaze class. To my surprise, the teacher was an infomercial

for medical interventions. Taking matters into my own hands, I used what I already knew about meditation to create a "pregnancy" tape to prepare for labor and delivery.

The class taught me breathing, but every day of the last trimester, I also listened to my relaxation and visualization tape. When I had my baby, it was without medication and in a state of trancelike calm.

"Visualization tapes are body-centered hypnosis," says Gayle Peterson, Ph.D., a Berkeley, California, psychotherapist who specializes in childbirth. "You need to let go of fears during pregnancy, so your body can do its work during labor."

"The tape's suggestions are shortcuts to relaxation. They allow you to release tension and respond properly to your own hormones for an easier birth," explains Peterson. "Women who've used tapes during pregnancy say that during labor they hear them replaying again and again in their minds."

A self-made tape is a great supplement to prepare for birth. These techniques are often included:

Progressive Relaxation Start with suggestions for slow breathing, such as, "In through your nose, out through your mouth." Bring each part of your body into consciousness, and relax one part at a time. Visualize whatever eases tension, such as sinking into your mattress.

Guided Imagery "Imagery works on the limbic system [the system in your brain that affects mood]," says Peterson. "People experience the suggestions like a dream. Imagery produces what is believed to be neurological memory and allows the

body to experience as closely as possible what birth feels like."

Many commercial pregnancy tapes use images, such as waves or a flower opening, to symbolize what will happen during labor.

Posthypnotic Suggestion Deep inside, you already know how to give birth. To tap into that knowledge, end the tape with a posthypnotic suggestion. For example, "My body knows how to labor."

To make your own tape, decide which techniques and images relax you, and write them into a script. Have someone else record the script, or record it yourself in a soothing voice. You may feel drowsy after

nancy. Side two is used in the last two weeks to prepare for birth. Peterson's enthusiasm can be overwhelming, but for those timid about birth, it can provide strong support. Particularly useful: her comparison of childbirth to going down a slide. Call (510) 527-7932.

■ *Softly Letting Go: Deep Relaxation for Pregnancy and Postpartum* by Maureen Braun, R.N. (Bodies and Babies, 1994; \$14). Side one, a whole-body relaxation, soothes with background guitar music. Side two can be used after delivery to improve "your ability to cope with daily frustrations." A classic relaxation tape, this is a good base upon which to build your own imagery. Call (800) 433-5523.

Relax and prepare for labor with a visualization tape. By Mary Jane Horton

listening. That's good; sleep helps the posthypnotic suggestions sink in.

You can use commercial tapes to help you relax and prepare for labor—or as models for a homemade tape:

■ *Coming Contractions: Pain Management for Labor* by Julie Tupler, R.N. (Maternal Fitness, 1994; \$15). This tape reassures you that labor isn't scary. Side one, to be used often during pregnancy, introduces key phrases that will be invaluable during labor. Side two, used during labor, includes those phrases. Call (212) 353-1947.

■ *Gayle Peterson's Body-Centered Hypnosis for Pregnancy, Bonding and Childbirth* (Shadow & Light Productions, 1991; \$12.95). The body-centered relaxation on side one offers suggestions for enjoying your preg-

■ *Baby & Me: Guided Relaxation Especially for Preterm Labor* by Sylvia Klein Olkin, M.S. (Be Healthy, Inc., 1994; \$13). This tape is useful for women with complications that put them at risk for preterm labor. Side one relaxes and reduces fears; side two emphasizes keeping baby inside, "close to mother's heartbeat." Call (800) 433-5523.

Helpful Handbooks

■ *An Easier Childbirth: A Mother's Guide for Birthing Normally* by Gayle Peterson. (Shadow & Light Publications, 1993; \$14.95). Call (800) 275-2606.

■ *Pregnant Feelings: Developing Trust in Birth* by Rahima Baldwin and Terra Palmarini Richardson (Celestial Arts, 1986; \$14.95). Call (800) 841-2665.