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Hypnosis helps ease childbirth

By Chris Zdeb, Canwest News Service September 24, 2008

There's nothing like the fear and anxiety of the first-time mom about to deliver her first baby.

Unless it's the second-time mom haunted by a traumatic first delivery.

"I think I had more fear, because I knew how bad it could be and I knew how I felt the last time, wanting to have a natural birth and not having it because I had an epidural, and feeling disappointed in myself," says Jes Elliott of Edmonton.

"The worst part was the recovery. It was really, really long, because the delivery was really, really long."

Elliott and her husband, Todd Unger, had taken a prenatal class to help prepare them for the birth of their son Toby, who is now three, but it didn't really help them, she says.

"What we learned was very generic. I just didn't have any skills to draw on, no action plan."

By the time Toby was delivered, "the joy of having the baby was completely gone," Elliott remembers.

She wasn't going to go through that again, so when Elliott became pregnant a second time, the yoga teacher contacted Caroline Stewart, a hypnobirthing educator at From Within Wellness Centre.

Hypnobirthing teaches expectant moms how to eliminate pain and fear from the birthing experience through self-hypnosis, which helps them experience discomfort as merely pressure.

"Some women become so relaxed they don't experience pain at all," Stewart says.

The biggest concern women have about childbirth is pain, Stewart says, but pain can be controlled with relaxation and positive thinking.

"The body follows the mind, so whatever you put in your mind determines how the body reacts," she told Elliott and Unger during the first of their two hypnobirthing sessions in June.

Unlike the birth of her son Toby, Elliott's delivery of daughter Isabel Marie on July 28 was all-natural with no intervention. Not that Elliott didn't beg for drugs, because she did, in the last two hours.

"Yeah, parts of it were hard. I don't want to make it sound like it was a cakewalk because it wasn't. But it wasn't negative," Elliott says.

She credits Unger and the doula who helped them for keeping her focused and talking her through the difficult parts of the delivery.

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