

Increase Your Success For a VBAC

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Many people will argue that if you have had one c-section, you will have future babies by c-section. However that is not true. There are many success stories of women having a vaginal birth after c-section. Melissa Spilsted provides great ways to help increase your success for a VBAC

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"I had desperately wanted to experience a natural labour for my second pregnancy", said Kathryn from Brisbane.

And Kathryn is not alone. VBACs (Vaginal Birth After Caesarean) are becoming more popular for many Australian women; and this is largely due to Australia's high caesarean rate.

The latest report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare on Australia's mothers and babies stated that 31.6% of women giving birth in 2010 did so via a caesarean, compared with 25.4% in 2001. This contrasts with the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations that the caesarean section rate should not be higher than 15%.

One cause of higher Caesarean rates is the relatively recent increase in repeat Caesareans – as many women go on to have another baby.

Despite the fact that 70-80% of women who attempt a VBAC succeed; around 83% of women in Australia will have a repeat caesarean (this figure varies between states, hospitals and private/public health). And yet there is much debate regarding why this is the case. Many mothers believe that the low VBAC rate has more to do with the attitude of doctors and institutions rather than the abilities or desires of women to have a vaginal birth.

So, what are some of the things that

are within our control – and can increase our chances of achieving a successful VBAC?

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is power. Start reading and researching pregnancy and VBAC related books.

If you have decisions to make along the way – it is important that you are able to make informed decisions based on prior knowledge and research.

Know the risks and benefits/pros and cons, for all scenarios. You are an intelligent and informed woman and parent, who is making important decisions for your own and baby's wellbeing.

"When you have techniques that enable you to stay calm and tension-free during your pregnancy and labour, you can reduce the need for drugs or interventions and increase your likeliness of attaining a successful VBAC"

SUPPORTIVE CAREGIVERS

You are much more likely to achieve your VBAC when you have the positive support and encouragement of your caregivers. You may need to do some research here, to find a caregiver who already has a track record of supporting VBACs. If possible, also consider options in having continuity of care with midwives.

Do some research. Perhaps speak to other mums from your area who have also had VBACs. Interview your caregivers and if you are not happy with the information given, then seek another opinion. You only get one chance to

birth your baby – so it is worth going to the extra effort here to ensure that you have the best support available.

RELEASE THE FEAR – MAINTAINING A POSITIVE MINDSET

Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right!

It is imperative that you address any fears that exist around this birth and your previous birth/s. Speak to your birth partner/doula/caregivers and or a professional about these fears and enlist support to help you to work through them.

SELF-HYPNOSIS

Self hypnosis skills can be learnt through hypnobirthing classes, a visit to a Clinical

Hypnotherapist, or through quality self-hypnosis recordings. This can help you to release fears and reservations and support a mindset conducive to success with your VBAC. Listen to pregnancy/birth related relaxation/self hypnosis tracks (such as those available through www.hypnobirthingaustralia.com.au) on a regular basis.

Create and then nurture your positive mindset. Affirmations are a wonderful tool for creating and maintaining your positive mindset throughout pregnancy and birth. Listen to recordings of affirmations (such as those on the Hypnobirthing Australia -



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Surge of the Sea album) or even write your own.

Surround yourself with positive messages. Stick visualisations and affirmations around your house. See them, say them, feel them, LIVE them!

Talk the talk. Be mindful of your self-talk. Focus on what you want, rather than what you don't want. Tell people how you wish your birth to pan out and try to avoid getting into negative conversations that are not of help to yourself or your baby.

QUALITY BIRTH PREPARATION

Prepare yourself with the knowledge and tools that you and your birth partner may need through the birth journey. Consider attending a quality, independent birth preparation class that isn't focused on a medical model of birthing.

Natural birthing classes are available throughout Australia and help to provide both the mother and birth partner with the knowledge and tools (breathing, visualisation, self-hypnosis, touch, relaxation etc.) that can help you achieve the positive

birth that you desire.

When you have techniques that enable you to stay calm and tension-free during your pregnancy and labour, you can reduce the need for drugs or interventions and increase your likeliness of attaining a successful VBAC.

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FOCUS ON EATING A BALANCED DIET AND STAY ACTIVE

Healthy mum, healthy bub. Be mindful of what nutrients you are feeding your body and your baby. Check with your caregiver, and engage in some daily exercise (such as walking, swimming, yoga etc.)

HIRE A DOULA

It is a very worthwhile investment to enlist the help of a supportive birth assistant who has a strong belief that birth is a normal function of the body and belief in you. A doula provides non-medical assistance and support leading up to, during and after your birth. They can also greatly reduce your chances of interventions. If there are decisions to be made throughout your labour, it is very handy to have an extra person to bounce ideas off. A doula can also really ease the pressure from other birth partners attending the birth.

WRITE OUT YOUR PREFERENCES

I don't like to refer to a 'Birth Plan'; I prefer to refer to them as Birth Preferences. These can be of great assistance to yourself and your birth partners.

Keep your Birth Preferences concise and at a reasonable length. I have found that the most effective style of Birth Preferences are those which are 1½ -2 pages in length, in dot-point form (rather than prose), with important words highlighted in bold print throughout.

It is recommended that you complete your preferences earlier in your pregnancy, and discuss them with your caregivers (midwife/doctor). Give them a copy of your preferences and ask them to read through them in your presence – so that they can discuss things with you at that time.

Take some copies of your preferences with you if birthing at a hospital. Your birth partner can go through them with the midwife/doctor when you arrive.

You may also wish to stick a copy of your Birth Preferences to the door of your birthing room.

YOUR BIRTH PARTNER

Choose a birth partner who you know is supportive of what you want and is committed to helping you achieve your goals. Ensure that they are very familiar with your Birth Preferences – because they can then speak on your behalf and advocate for you, during the birth. Your birth partner needs to be as prepared as you are, with the knowledge and tools that they can use to support and help you through your labour and birth.

Having a VBAC is very achievable and very worthwhile.

Some circumstances are outside of our control; however if we are able to prepare our mind and body, enlist good support, build our knowledge and have tools to draw upon during our birth – we maximise the chance of a successful VBAC and our level of satisfaction with whatever turns our birthing might take.

Many of the VBAC mums that I teach (in Hypnobirthing Australia classes) comment on how much better prepared and empowered they feel leading up to their VBAC birth, in comparison to previous birth/s; and I particularly love receiving their inspiring birth stories when they achieve their goals.

I think that Kathryn (who was quoted at the beginning of this story), describes the feeling perfectly when she says...

"The intense relief and rush of emotions was indescribable. I had beaten my caesarean by 16 hours. Our little Alexa was born by successful VBAC. No drugs, no forceps, no ventouse. And I've never been more proud of achieving anything in my entire life!"

Now that is an empowered and positive birth that is worth striving for!

Melissa Spilsted is a well-known Clinical Hypnotherapist (CHT) & Childbirth Educator (HPCE). She is a qualified Teacher (B.Ed, B.Arts) and director of Hypnobirthing Australia™.

www.hypnobirthingaustralia.com.au

It Takes A WHOLE Village

By Jenny England

Two-year old Elly is fast asleep, cuddled up next to me on the sofa. I shut my eyes and flash back 30 years to similar afternoons with her mother. It's warm and cosy and I am a relaxed grandma with time on my hands to ponder how children are much the same despite the massive changes that are taking place in the world around us.

"It takes a whole village to raise a child" suddenly pops into my head. This saying has been attributed to an ancient African (Igbo and Yoruba) proverb, meaning that the upbringing of a child is a communal effort and the responsibility of a whole village. In 21st century Australia, however, most families don't live in villages or communities that might be considered compact and integrated enough to be compared to an Igbo village. Our fast-paced technological globalised world is changing the face of suburbs and towns which frequently all but empty each morning as the adults and older children join a steady stream of cars crowding roads, off to workplaces and schools often far from home. Nuclear families are less likely to live within an arm's reach of close relatives or friends than in the past. Grandparents are likely to be still working or engaged in volunteer work or using their hard-earned money travelling.

But what is replacing the 'village' these days in order to help raise our precious children?

Any expert would agree that a community that supports families and cares for children is a stronger and better functioning community on all levels. It benefits parents and children as well as everyone else in the wider society. Extended family and neighbourhood friends of all ages, shapes and sizes are vitally important to children as they grow into members of the community themselves. Learning to relate to older members of the community particularly, and as this quote by Ann and Charles Morse reflects, they don't even have to be blood-related:

"A child needs a grandparent, anybody's grandparent, to grow a little more securely into an unfamiliar world."



Informal parent and community groups and Playgroups can certainly play a part in the early pre-school years. They can be one of the main threads that link the youngest and their carers to their neighbourhood, community, ethnic or cultural group and ultimately the wider world. On the surface Playgroups might appear to 21st century eyes as simply a place for children to go to have a little fun for a few hours but if you dig a little deeper it becomes clearer how vital these few hours and the contacts that the children and their carers make, not just for the child's wellbeing and parent's sanity but also for the overall health of society

And what of today's 'virtual villages'? I suspect that Skype video conferencing and social media sites like Facebook are here to stay. While nothing can really replace close face-to-face contact with others in a real live community setting, they of course can still be a way to bridge many gaps. What matters most is that the responsibility for the emotional and social health of the young generation is placed in more hands than that of the nuclear family. In a child-friendly community all members are valued equally; children are allowed to form all kinds of relationships and participate and express themselves. They are protected from harm and neglect and helped to reach their potential.

So let's all join hands and encourage the creation of new 21st century 'villages' that support and nurture our young, I think as Elly begins to stir and I get ready to take her down to my local park to play while I chat with some of the other mums and grandmas.

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