

'Breathe the baby out?!'

'Rainbow relaxation? Trances? Have Jennie and Ben gone mad or simply discovered the secret to an easy birth...

Jennie says...

'Early in my pregnancy, Ben very excitedly called me to tell me he'd just watched an interview with Nadia Sawalha who had been raving about hypnobirthing, saying how it had made her birth an amazing experience and that she had literally "breathed the baby out". To say I was sceptical is an understatement; if Ben had to poo out a watermelon, I wonder how keen he would be to rely on breathing when there are megadose painkillers available. And why would so many women choose pain relief if birth was as simple as just breathing? To humour him, I agreed to look into it and this month we find ourselves at our first session of a four-night hypnobirthing course.

'Our teacher, Gilly Gibbin, is fantastic. She makes me believe that I could actually do this without pain relief, and I feel very excited about feeling in control and bringing our child into the world in a relaxed and peaceful environment. We go through all the breathing techniques for each stage and I practice the relaxation between classes.

'The natural conclusion to this approach to birth is having the baby in the more homely surroundings of a birth centre, rather than our local hospital, so we take a look around and decide that we would like a water birth with only gas and air if needed. You have to make it to 37 weeks if you want to use the birth centre, which bothers me as I still have the feeling Baby Freeman is coming early – maybe because my mum gave birth to us lot at 35 weeks, or down to my chronic excitement about becoming a mum.

'I think I'm probably over-thinking things, but I do worry about getting him out safely. We are almost at the finish line and I have bonded with my feisty little bump, looking forward to his nightly gymnastics. I couldn't bear to think of anything happening to him at this late stage. Stories of celebrities losing their babies late in pregnancy have also put the fear in me. But focussing on the positive, I'm using my breathing techniques on my Braxton Hicks (practice) contractions, and am visualising an easy water birth with a short labour. Well it can't hurt, can it?'

'I COULDN'T GET THROUGH THIS MONTH WITHOUT...

... long soaks in the bath, reading *What To Expect When You're Expecting*. Blissful!'

Ben says...

'Considering I had been the one who had suggested the idea of hypnobirthing, I wasn't the best student. I managed to say something inappropriate at every session; when the teacher asked about what kind of situation made me feel "in my most hypnotic state" I replied "whenever my wife is talking to me".'

'We watched a couple of births by women who had used hypnobirthing techniques, which wouldn't be my first choice of evening viewing, but you have to see these women to believe it. One minute, they were sat in their pool, in some kind of intense trance listening to soothing music and then a baby popped out... just like that! Quite freaky, but utterly mesmerising.

'The classes, both extremely calming and assuring, were also a great chance to meet other couples. Funnily enough, one couple we made friends with will be our neighbours when we finally move house (what a place to meet!).

'During one session we were in the middle of the "rainbow relaxation" – a meditation to help prepare for a peaceful birth – when, right on cue, screams from a woman in the labour ward next door came through the open window. We all desperately tried to suppress our laughter while the teacher, Gilly, shut the window – all the time continuing to read the meditation – then said "obviously not one of mine".'

'The course definitely made us feel more confident that we can have the birth we want and that there are other options, like a water birth, which Jennie's quite keen on. It sounds rather like a spa treatment where you end up with a baby at the end...'

