



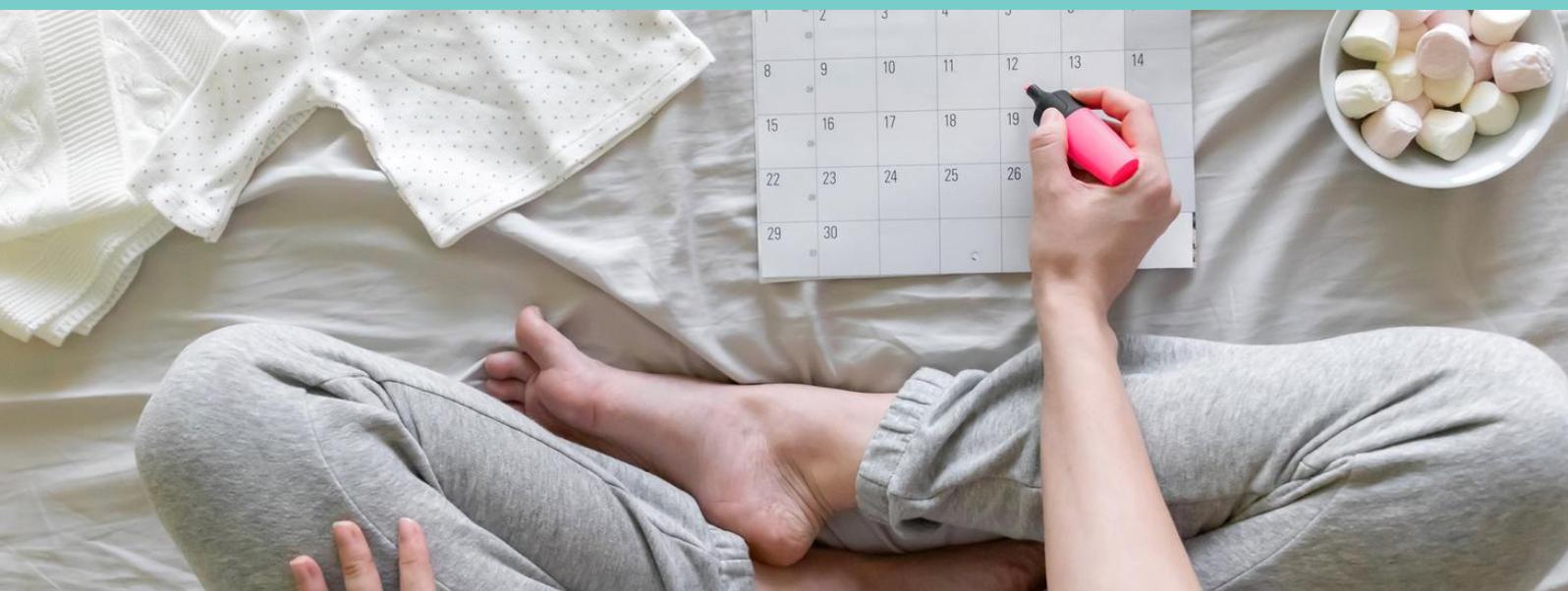
3 EARLY PREGNANCY TIPS THAT SET YOU UP FOR A POSITIVE BIRTH EXPERIENCE

Here are a few tips that might make your pregnancy and birth experience much easier. Please remember these are suggestions only, and, as with everything birth-related, you decide whether it's right for you and your baby.

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1. Keep your estimated due date a secret...or add a good few weeks to it.



I cannot overemphasize how **important** this is. In your early and mid pregnancy, many friends and family will be asking about your "estimated due date", or simply "when are you due". It is, of course, super-exciting to share the news. Here's the thing...

Sometime between the pregnancy announcement and before the birth, the **estimated** part becomes just "due". People, including some healthcare providers, forget that this is just a **finger-in-the-air-guesstimate**. In fact, so called "modern" pregnancy date calculators and "whirly wheels" used by most midwives are based on a small study by a Danish chap over 200 years ago!!! That fact gives a hint as to the accuracy of dating pregnancy. Only 5% babies are born on their *guess date*. Yep, I'm calling it a **guess date**. Five percent! In another words, this method of estimating pregnancy due date is accurate for 5 out of 100 babies. It doesn't seem like the estimation is very accurate, does it? The issue here is, people forget this is guess work and and this has consequences.

What often happens is that, as you're nearing your *guess date*, your friends and family, quite naturally, will be super keen to find out if "the baby is here yet". Now imagine five, 10 or 15 texts, messages or phone calls a day asking you "is the baby here yet?" Every. Single. Day. For. Two. Weeks, or three weeks, or sometimes longer... It's not fun, well, certainly not for the pregnant mum or pregnant parent! Trust me, they will be nagging you with phone calls, if they get a chance. Patience and waiting for something that unfolds naturally ranks rather low in today's society obsessed with time, efficiency, and instant gratification.

Worse still, it creates subtle pressure, or even significant stress for some mums who might already be tired and simply wanting some peace and well-needed rest, at a crucial time of their pregnancy.

Here's another big thing...**birth and stress do not go hand in hand**, well, they shouldn't. Pressure, *however subtle*, may prevent your body and your baby from initiating labour. This is the exact opposite of what we want on our *guess date*.

The *guess date* comes and goes, and simply by existing, it creates an expectation...and that expectation may lead to disappointment and stress later on, when you really, *really* need to relax and welcome your baby.

The good news is that you can do something about it, even in your early pregnancy, long *before* it snowballs.

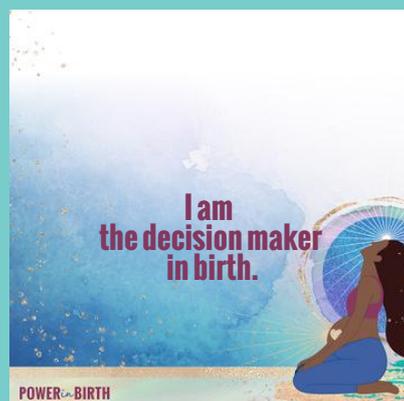
Managing the *guess date* pressure starts early, and, depending on how you go about it, it might have a significant, **calming**, effect on your birth experience...

One way to manage this, is **switching off your phone** and enjoying the last few days with your baby, while they are a part of you, like no one else. After all, they are the only person in the world who knows the beating of your heart from the inside out...

Another way is simply **not sharing your guess date** with family and friends. Some parents add a few weeks and say, for example, "*I'm due in June*" when, in fact, their guess date is at the beginning of May. You decide what is best for you and your baby. If you do want to share your guess date, have a think about how it may affect you later on. It is, obviously, always your call: **your body, your baby, your choice**.

If you feel disappointed when the baby doesn't arrive on their *guess date*, try framing this as a **precious extra time**, just for you and your baby, two (or more!) souls sharing one body.

This is a perfect time to **honour your baby**, by connecting with them, doing gentle breathing exercises that will help during birth, and by letting your baby decide when to initiate labour. Try to have as much rest as possible, if possible.



2. Pick a natural scent that you find relaxing

God, is this going to be about lavender?! Yes, sorry, partially, at least. Hear me out...

Do you have any favourite scents that take you *right back* to a happy childhood memory, or to a fabulous holiday experience? A smell of your favourite childhood dish that reminds you of being carefree, a smell of hot chocolate drink on a cold evening ushering in the feeling of cosiness...

Scents do have an enormous power to transport us from present to past in a blink, and evoke **feelings** we associate with those past experiences.



The wonderful thing about aromatherapy is that you can create an **association** between **feeling relaxed** and your chosen scent. Even better, you can use it, so that the scent becomes a trigger for your **complete relaxation**. Needless to say, staying relaxed comes *very handy* during birth. *There's a catch though!* You need time to create that association. It only takes a minute each day, but consistency is key.

Most importantly, aromatherapy is a *proven* holistic treatment (*links to studies in References*) that uses natural plant extracts to promote well-being and to *manage pain*. Essential oils, such as **frankincense** or **lavender**, are very useful in labour because of their wonderful *soothing* properties.

There's a few things you need to know before you start:

- Treat them with caution- all essential oils cross the placenta to your baby.
- Be aware of safety, never apply any essential oils directly on your skin, or ingest them.
- Never pour them directly into your birthing pool or a bath.
- Select a reputable essential oil seller-the best essential oils are 100% plant derived, without any other additives.
- Some oils must be diluted before use. Always read the instructions before you use them.



Lots of essential oils are safe to use in pregnancy, and remain especially popular in birth, so if you are just starting out with aromatherapy stick to scents such as **frankincense**, **lavender** or **chamomile**. Try adding just a few drops into diffuser, into a room spray or onto a flannel. You could even put a few drops on a handkerchief and keep it in your wardrobe for a subtle waft of your favourite essential oil.

To unlock the power of aromatherapy in pregnancy and birth:

- Try to diffuse a bit of lavender or frankincense just before you go to bed, when taking a bath (*a gentle reminder not to pour the essential oils directly in water*) or at whatever times you're feeling most relaxed, cosy and safe.
- Repeat this as often as you can, perhaps each evening or at weekends. Maxing this little ritual for many weeks will create a powerful trigger for deep relaxation that you can reach for during birth...Any time you need to feel calm, have a sniff of the delicate scent to transport yourself to that relaxed, blissful state.
- If you're choosing to birth in a hospital or a birth centre, pack your favourite essential oil with you. The whiff of familiar scent will help you neutralise the hospital smells. Just *mist the pillows and blankets* on arrival, and it might help you with creating that wonderful feeling of calm and relaxation that is so important at birth.



3. Visualise the birth you want

Spoiler alert: birth happens in the brain....

I know, you're probably thinking "*last time I checked, it was happening in uterus and vagina*". Yes, that's riiight, but... the hormones needed for efficient contractions are **released by the brain** into the bloodstream and then get to your uterus through the blood vessels. Your **brain** is the **key player** here! It's your primal, *instinctive* part of brain that needs to **feel safe** to be able to do the job of releasing the right hormones.



So how to create visualisations to support this process?

- Try to **focus on the things you want**, as opposed to focusing on negatives or on the elements you want to avoid (e.g. *I am birthing my baby in water* vs. *I don't want to birth on a bed*).
- Have a go at imagining **every tiniest detail** you can: how does the birth of your baby start, who is with you, how does the air feel on your skin, what is the room like, what are the colours and scents, how do you feel, what snacks are you having, what is happening in the later stages of birth, how do you manage the contractions, do you catch your baby, or perhaps your birth partner does, where are you when you're waiting for the umbilical cord to go white and flat, who cuts the cord and so on...
- If you are intending to birth in a hospital or a birth centre, try to visit the actual ward or birth unit beforehand. Most UK midwife led units allow visits. Make notice how to get there, where to park, which lift to take etc. It really saves a ton of stress on the day, when you're birthing your baby without getting lost or searching for where to park etc. Use *every detail* from your tour in your visualisation.

- If visiting in person is not possible, check the hospital page for virtual tour, or even ask your midwife for a snap of the birthing room and birthing spaces. You could still make your way to your chosen hospital and see what is the best way to get there, where to park etc.
- To trick your brain into thinking this event has already happened, and therefore it's familiar and **safe**, write it down as a story **in the past tense**, and re-read it with your birth partner perhaps. Add details as you go on to make it as realistic as possible. Read it, and visualise it, as often as possible.

The aim of this repetition is to train your brain to get feeling familiar-and safe- with the events you're imagining. Your *instinctive brain*, the part of the brain responsible for managing birth, will not "know" the difference between a story and reality. When it comes to the actual event, the instinctive brain will be much less likely to "freak out" because it is already familiar with what is happening.

It's a bit like going somewhere completely unknown for the first time or being in an entirely new situation. First time, there is a bit of apprehension, or maybe even fear. The second time, it is a bit easier and the subsequent times are a breeze because of the familiarity...you've done it before, so no big deal.

Use this **brain hack** to prepare for the birth of your baby-*the more you practice the better the chances of it happening exactly the way you want*. This technique was first applied in basic *sports psychology* and it is what top professional athletes and sportspeople do every time they compete. For example, most professional footballers visualise the winning match, and winning goal, in the tiniest of details. Nobody wins a match thinking they will fail. Top athletes prepare for big events **way ahead** by visualising the best version of events. If it works for them, it is likely to work for you.



Please note

This guide is not a substitute for the medical advice or the presence during birth or any part of pregnancy or labour of a qualified medical practitioner. As with all things pregnancy and birth, you decide what is right for you and your baby.

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