

Prenatal options expand

Clare Stoeckle
Calgary Herald

Thursday, October 13, 2005

The popularity of today's alternative birthing services including midwifery and doula support has created an unprecedented demand for prenatal classes that promote natural childbirth. As a result, holistic prenatal programs available to expectant mothers are ever-expanding (not unlike their waistlines!).

Two of the most well-attended alternatives to traditional prenatal courses are the Bradley method of natural childbirth and hypnobirthing (also known as the Mongan method).

Despite their recent rise from relative obscurity, these programs have been successfully educating couples for several decades. Rhonda Gordon, a local Bradley method instructor, says that as awareness about the benefits of natural childbirth increases, enrolment in her classes is growing exponentially.

Both designed by experienced obstetricians, the Bradley method and hypnobirthing give parents important tools to achieve relaxation and natural pain relief during childbirth.

The more intensive Bradley method also gives program participants the tools to make decisions about a broad spectrum of pregnancy and birthing procedures (including epidurals and episiotomies), prenatal nutrition information and an exercise series that prepares the body for labour.

Like many holistic health services, Bradley method and hypnobirthing classes grant more personalized attention than government-sponsored programs may be able to offer.

Courses are sometimes held in private homes, with class sizes kept intentionally small. This allows participants to enjoy an intimate and relaxing setting, one that allows them the time and comfort to explore all their thoughts and questions about childbearing.

Participants report they gain a heightened level of confidence surrounding the birth process and find that this has helped them to accomplish their birthing goals and

overcome the fears and misconceptions that surround first-time parenting.

This doesn't mean couples achieve natural births 100 per cent of the time, says Gordon, "but even those (couples) who run into complications say they stayed calm and managed themselves more effectively because they knew what to expect and how to handle the situation."

When asked to define the demographics of Bradley method participants, Gordon says it's impossible to generalize about the type of people who take alternative prenatal classes.

"The variation is remarkable," she says. "I've taught people from every profession, every income bracket and every cultural background. Approximately half my couples chose midwifery care to support their pregnancy journey while the other half chooses the more traditional route of a doctor or an obstetrician."

In other words, holistic pre-natal programs are not just for the wealthy or for the "New Age" set.

Research has proven that most women who engage in prenatal education, alternative or traditional, improve their chances of bearing healthy children.

Even couples who have already had a child using traditional prenatal instruction can benefit from a holistic birthing program during future pregnancies.

The Bradley method and hypnobirthing are just two of several options open to Albertans. Interested couples should visit www.birthunlimited.ca, a website for the local non-profit organization Birthing Unlimited, or pick up a copy of their publication Birthing Magazine. It is available for free at several local businesses and wellness centres.

© The Calgary Herald 2005

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.