

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

A regular column tracking the highs and lows of pregnancy from the first inkling to the final push

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●● I now FEEL much MORE ACCUSTOMED to the IDEA of LABOUR as a NATURAL PROCESS ●●

For me, finding out the sex of my baby has been invaluable, allowing me to bond with her in a more precise way. In the fortnight before my 20-week scan, I had started to imagine I was having a

boy. It was an unconscious and pointless exercise, but I suspect countless women would admit to something similar. When the scan arrived and the gender pendulum (the gendulum?) swung the other way, I felt a sudden and unexpected pang of disappointment as my figment-son faded into obscurity. Of course, it wasn't long before the pang itself was replaced by gratitude, excitement and affection for my forthcoming little girl, but the experience was an interesting insight into the maternal mind: the bond between a mother and her unborn child (even, in my case, an imaginary version of it) can be incredibly swift-growing and strong.

In a bid to better understand and strengthen this bond, I returned to hypnobirthing, this time with the aid of birth preparation expert Cheryl MacDonald, founder of Birth ROCKS. Cheryl and her specialist team (which includes midwives, massage therapists and yoga teachers) founded the Birth ROCKS Academy, which offers courses and therapies for new and expectant parents. Courses can be designed around your preferences, and look to slow down the often hectic hurtle towards birth, allowing you to plan and prepare properly for what is, after all, a major life experience (and possibly a brand new one).

The team also runs Baby ROCKS, a course which addresses the practical side of parenting once baby has arrived. My hypnobirthing session was impressive, and went a long way to explaining the link between relaxation and stress-free birth while breaking down various lingering fears. I now feel much more accustomed

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of the best baby

ACCESSORIES



1. URBO2 MAMAS & PAPAS STROLLER WITH NAVY AND CHROME CHASSIS, £449; mamasandpapas.com 2. ATON Q REAR-FACING CHILD SEAT, £185; cybex-online.com/gb 3. KIPLING BABY BACKPACK, £102; kipling.com

to the idea of labour as a natural process, one in which the calmer I am, the more stress-free and straightforward it will be. My partner – usually quite the cynic – echoed my sentiments, having found the mindfulness aspect of the session a bit of an eye-opener.

Of course, even as I've been learning to relax and prepare for a positive birth, I've been gearing up for the practical side of having a baby. Researching strollers and all manner of other accessories is quite a task. Amid a mountain of reviews, reports, test-drives and best-buys, one stroller stood out for us: the Mamas & Papas Urbo2: lightweight, manoeuvrable and adaptable from birth to 36 months and up. It also folds down easily – great for me, as I'm not the most mechanically adroit. The stroller is available in a range of sleek colours and there's even a special edition printed version featuring a design by Donna Wilson; it is also compatible with the Cybex Aton Q car seat, which is the best in the business. Alongside my very desirable new baby-changing rucksack by Kipling – think grainy black leather, moisture-proof inner lining, all sorts of useful pockets and a changing mat to boot – it has me ready and raring to go. All I need now is the baby... ♦

● **BIRTH ROCKS**
Various locations;
birthrocksacademy.com