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Hypnosis May Reduce Pain, Complications of Labor

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) Jun 13 - Self-hypnosis during childbirth may ease some of the pain of labor, lower the risk of medical complications and reduce the need for surgery, study results suggest.

Hypnotherapy has been shown to reduce pain and the need for anesthesia, as well as ease anxiety and fear during childbirth, Dr. Paul G. Schauble and colleagues note in the *Journal of Family Practice* for May. The use of hypnosis during pregnancy to prepare women for delivery may be key since it gives them a sense of control, they say.

To investigate, the researchers, who are at the University of Florida in Gainesville, assigned 42 pregnant teenagers to receive either counseling or four sessions of instruction in self-hypnosis for childbirth. Teens in the hypnosis group learned deep relaxation and imagery techniques to help them cope with pain. They also received suggestions to help them respond to possible complications and boost their confidence in their ability to manage anxiety.

According to the report, only 1 of 22 patients in the hypnosis group remained in the hospital longer than 2 days after delivery, compared with 8 of 20 patients who did not learn self-hypnosis. None of the patients in the hypnosis group needed surgical intervention, compared with 60% of those in the non-hypnosis group.

In addition, fewer patients in the hypnosis group experienced complications such as high blood pressure or vacuum-assisted delivery, opted for medical anesthesia or oxytocin, or required medication after delivery.

"This study provides empirical data demonstrating that the use of hypnosis in preparing pregnant women for labor and delivery reduces the risk of complications, decreases the need for medical intervention...and promotes safer, more comfortable delivery for mother and child," Dr. Schauble told Reuters Health. "We anticipate this will lead to a reduction in the costs involved in childbirth."