

Mothering your unborn child

Nadia Raafat explains why it's so important to take some time out and bond with unborn baby and how that will benefit you and your baby in the long term

When does a baby become a baby?

Some say at the exact moment of conception. **When does a mother become a mother?** At exactly the same time.

Even when your baby is a cluster of cells, an embryo, its heart is beating. Scientists can track the heart from five weeks, the baby's brain waves from six. It's good to remember that when you're listless, vomiting and on your knees, that you are already mothering an unborn soul. What your baby perceives, what it takes on while it is in uterus from this point, becomes part of its essence and its identity.

Some of the most cherished moments of my two pregnancies were spent bonding with my baby in uterus, whether singing softly to my first bump late at night in bed, or visualising my second bump floating happily in his sac of water, whether getting my partner to put his hot hands on my swollen belly so that both bumps could feel the pressure of their father's hands, or chanting – proven to be good for babies in the uterus well as for the mother, so through both pregnancies, I felt in tune with my babies.

So in tune, in fact, that I knew my first baby was going to be a boy. And, the second time around, after a breech and subsequent c-section, I knew and believed my second son was going to work with me to manifest a natural birth. We did.

Now that my bumps are gone and my boys are leaving their babyhood behind, I recall those moments with longing and nostalgia. Pregnancy – the carrying of the baby – is a unique and special time. And when it's over, it's over. It can be tough at times – don't we know it – but it's still a magnificent trip, a journey we never forget. So much so, in fact, that many

women really mourn the end of a pregnancy, feel a sense of great loss. And it's not the aches, twinges, pukes and heartburn they're mourning either.

Pregnancy is that chance to lay the foundations for a close and loving relationship. Your love for your baby is a very powerful tool. Not only will it serve you in birth – the will and deep desire to see your baby can carry you through the toughest contractions, but it will see you through the rocky moments of new motherhood.

When you've got a skinny pink thingamajig shrieking blue murder, a pile of soiled nappies and a back that feels like its about to spit in two, that love for your child will stand you in better stead to cope with the situation. Your pre-natal bonding with your baby will help you to perceive the situation a little more kindly.

As an ante and post natal yoga teacher, encouraging mothers to bond with their unborn babies is part of my job. I think this is some of the most important work of any pregnancy yoga class. At the end of every session, the mothers go through a deep relaxation and are guided to visualise their babies floating in their sacs of water, to relax with them, to feel their baby's life flourishing within them, to visualise meeting them at the end of a safe and successful birth. The mothers (and babies) love it.

Mothering your unborn child means thinking about how you communicate around it, the tone of voice you use, the kind of food you eat and the air you breathe. Most importantly, it means the kind of emotions you feel. If there are lots of negative emotions around, it's worth

reflecting on what you can practically do to change that.

Learning to relax is one of the most important things mothers can do. I don't mean kicking your shoes off and waddling for the sofa and the remote control. I mean relaxing without distraction, listening to the sound of your own breathing, being still and quiet enough to feel the flow of your own breath.

Sing to your babies – a gentle lullaby – because they are in water, the vibrations will give them a sonic massage. Not only will it soothe them now, the chances are they'll recognise and be soothed by it on the other side of you.

Stroke them at every opportunity. They can feel the heat of your hands and get your partner to stroke your bumps too.

Attend an antenatal yoga class. There's bound to be one in your area. Every antenatal class begins and ends with a relaxation period giving the mother a chance to connect with her unborn child.

And as you go about your day, remember they're there with you; touch them, stroke them, talk to them, sing to them, play them music – love them.

The more you think of yourself as a team, the closer you will feel.

For more details on Nadia's ante and post-natal yoga classes visit www.hypnology.com or call 07771 687 128.

