

'I hypnotised myself and had a pain-free birth

Presenter **Beverley Turner**, 31, wife of Olympic rowing hero James Cracknell, reveals how she gave birth to her son Croyde, now 19-months-old, without a single painkiller...

Looking at Beverley Turner with her son Croyde, you'd be forgiven for assuming she's just another 'too posh to push' celeb mum. Well, you don't get that super-flat tum back without a little nip and tuck while the surgeon's tidying up your C-section, do you? But in fact, not only did Bev give birth naturally, she did it without so much as an aspirin – and hardly felt a thing. 'The trend of celebrities having elective caesareans is ridiculous,' she says. 'It fuels the myths that surround childbirth. We're our own worst enemies because we love to share horror stories about how much it hurts and how terrifying the whole experience is. But it doesn't have to be like that.'

And Bev is living proof. 'Just after I found out I was pregnant, I saw a documentary on hypnobirthing, where you put yourself in a calm, positive state of mind through self-hypnosis,' she explains. 'I thought, "Fantastic! That's how I want to do it." You need a hypnobirthing partner to give you encouragement during labour, so it was a great way of getting my husband James involved.'

Frankly, if he was hanging round with nothing to do, I knew he'd only get in the way.'

The couple found a hypnobirthing coach who helped prepare Bev for a stress-free delivery. 'It's based on the principle that fear makes you tense, then tension creates pain,' she explains. 'When you go into labour, your womb contracts to push the baby out – but if you're all clenched up, the muscles won't work properly. And who wouldn't be tense after years of hearing how scary giving birth is? The classes teach you breathing and visualisation exercises to banish those thoughts from your mind and relax your muscles to help your baby out easily.'

It sounds horribly LA,' she admits. 'But the classes were actually really funny – we spent

most of the time giggling.' The positive baby planning started before Croyde was even conceived, Bev laughs. 'We wanted to have a baby after the Formula One season finished (she was commentating for ITV at the time) and before James's Olympic year started. The problem was, James was going to be abroad training for much of that time. I did the maths and worked out I might have to fly to Milan to have a sh*g, as that's when I would be fertile that month! Luckily, though, I got pregnant sooner than we expected, so I didn't have to make a 3,000-mile booty call.'

Whether it was thanks to the hypnobirthing coaching or not, Bev sailed through her pregnancy. 'I didn't get morning sickness, so I really made the most of it food-wise,' she says. 'I spent my 20s holding my stomach in, so it was great to eat loads of cake and let it all hang out. And my boobs looked fantastic!'

'I only felt uncomfortable near the end when my bump got huge,' she says. 'I was trying to finish writing a book and the only way I

could get comfy was to sit on a Swiss ball with my laptop, and jiggle up and down. My midwife said it was the best thing I could have done, as it literally bounced Croyde into exactly the right position for birth.'

By the time she went into labour, Bev was so relaxed she insisted on catching that week's *Sex And The City* episode before going to hospital. 'I listened to the hypnobirthing tape, then I got into the birthing pool at 4am,' she recalls. 'Being in the water softens your skin and muscles, so everything happens faster and more easily. Croyde popped out at 9.30am and I didn't have any tearing or need any stitches.'

'Halfway through, however, I did start to panic it was going to hurt,' she admits. 'I told the midwife, "Get me

the gas and air now!", but she said, "Why? You're doing so beautifully." And she was right, I didn't need it. We went back to repeating the positive affirmations over and over – things like "You're doing brilliantly, it's all going well" – and I relaxed again. 'Giving birth was probably worse for James than me,' Bev laughs. 'He cradled my head in the water for the whole five hours. All the calluses on his hands from rowing peeled off and his skin was red-raw. But I felt brilliant, like I was floating in another world. I'd recommend hypnobirthing to anyone, it was a lovely experience.' Bev was similarly relaxed about getting back into her size 10 jeans. 'I don't know how Victoria Beckham got rid of her baby weight so quickly. I think it's a very dangerous example to set,' she says. 'I didn't weigh myself when I was pregnant so I've no idea how much I put on, but it took me six months to get down to a size 12 and another year after that to get back to size 10. And that's totally normal,' she stresses. 'I breast-fed for five months and you shouldn't even think about dieting during that time.'

Regular exercise helped Bev get back

in trim, although Croyde was the closest she had to a personal trainer. 'Running around after a baby was the most exercise I'd ever done. I was constantly on the go. I didn't have time to go to the gym, so I worked off the pounds by pushing Croyde for miles in his pram.'

But toning up after childbirth isn't just about getting back into your skinny jeans. 'Vaginal toning is the last female taboo,' she says. 'One in three women suffer from stress incontinence because of a weakened pelvic floor, but we're too embarrassed to talk about it. Most women think it's just giving birth vaginally that causes it, but it's really the strain of carrying a baby for nine months that weakens the muscles. 'My midwife nagged me to do pelvic floor exercises throughout my pregnancy to keep everything strong down there,' she says.

'I'm glad to say I didn't get stress incontinence after having Croyde, but as a preventative measure I've started using a new pelvic floor toning system by Vielle (see box, right). It's reassuring to see everything is still working properly, especially as I'd like another baby someday.'

'You put the toner inside you like a tampon and you can see it moving if you're squeezing the right muscles. If you need it, there's a 12-week programme, where you start on larger, lighter toners, then move onto smaller, heavier ones. By the end you'll be able to fire out ping-pong balls!' she jokes. 'Although I don't think I'll be taking that up as my new career...'

And as for women's biggest post-baby worry? 'Giving birth naturally doesn't mean the end of your sex life,' she says. 'It's a terrible myth that you'll be left all stretched and baggy, and neither of you will ever be able to feel a thing again. The female body is an amazing thing and everything really does tighten up again.'

'You simply need to work on that area like you do any other bit of your body,' she says. 'It's a muscle just like any other, so you have to use it or lose it.'

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Bev and Olympic gold medallist James on their wedding day