

VIEW
PREGNANCY
AS YOUR MOST
IMPORTANT
SPORTING EVENT

BY CHANEL SCHOEMAN

GIVING BIRTH IS LIKE RUNNING A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT.



PREPARING FOR NATURAL CHILDBIRTH

Labour and birth are often likened to various sports. Granted, many pregnant women don't feel particularly sporty during pregnancy, but before you rekindle your childhood disdain for PT classes or liken labour to being caught in a scrum, let me assure you that there are no other physical activities that a woman's body has been so perfectly designed for. Within each stage of labour and birth our bodies have awe-inspiring ways to facilitate this natural process and guide us to the podium of motherhood.

Soon-to-be moms can actually benefit quite a lot from viewing birth as an important sporting event that you need to prepare for. Many of the techniques that athletes employ to train for a sporting challenge are very beneficial in getting ready for labour and birth. Of course conditioning the body for peak performance is imperative to participating in any physical event, but don't forget that top athletes prepare both body and mind. They research and prepare for anything and everything that might have a bearing on the outcome of the match, including the rules of the game, the environment and the conditions. They practise responses to various scenarios and visualise their perfect outcome. They choose their support team carefully and select the most conducive environment.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE PRACTICAL THINGS THAT PREGNANT WOMEN CAN DO TO PREPARE THEIR MINDS FOR THE BIRTHING PROCESS:

- **Take ownership of your birth:** A wealth of information is at your fingertips. Inform yourself of the development of your unborn baby, the labour process and its stages, the birthing options and their implications, as well as the various scenarios. Birth isn't something that a medical team performs to you. Like Charlize Theron, you are the star, producer and director of this show.
- **Set goals:** Decide what you want. Outline your overall birth plan and provide details on the issues that you feel strongly about.

- **Choose your birth caregivers and environment wisely:**

Once you've decided what you want from your birth, make sure that you select an environment that will facilitate a positive outcome and a care team that is aligned to honour your choices. Ask questions and talk to them early and often about what you do and do not want. In much the same way athletes will go to the ends of the earth to secure a trainer whose approach facilitates success, or to find the right environment or conditions to practise for a match.

- **Create a positive expectancy:**

Anticipate a positive outcome and condition your mind regularly to be confident and optimistic with thoughts and affirmations such as: "My body is perfectly designed to birth naturally, with ease and comfort". Surround yourself with people who are positive and supportive. Avoid and disengage from any doom profits or horror story broadcasters.

- **Visualise your ideal birth:**

Practise mental walk-throughs of your ideal birth regularly. Engage all your senses, add emotion and, in your mind, picture the details of how you want your birth to unfold.

- **Practise relaxation and labour comfort techniques:** No athlete can perform at their peak when their bodies are in the grips of fear and stress. The correct mindset, breathing, relaxation and visualisation techniques, as well as facilitative body positions during labour can greatly enhance comfort and assist smooth birthing. Regular exercise of these