

Sweep

I had a sweep before my last baby (number 6) was born in June last year. It was the first time I'd had a sweep, having always said before that if the baby wasn't ready, I didn't want to go interfering. Well, I was impatient and getting fed up with lots of typical pre-labour, which women who've had several babies before often get. Weeks on end there would be ctx every 5 mins for several hours, then it would all tail off, but I was still getting ctx which took my breath away through the day, every 10-20 mins. I was in a lot of discomfort. For this and various other reasons, my midwife offered to do a cervical check, and then offered a sweep when she found my cervix was very favourable. Actually I have to admit that it was partly also for research purposes, in that I had read a lot about sweeps over the years, seen so much discussion on here, and I was curious.

My midwife was very experienced at doing sweeps and had a high success rate of women labouring shortly afterwards – we'd talked about it, and her view is that if you're going to do a sweep, to be effective it should be a thorough sweep and last about 5 minutes – otherwise it may be just going through the motions. She was very careful and kept asking if I was OK and if I wanted her to stop, but actually this first one was not that uncomfortable. It felt a bit like a mini washing machine on a very slow spin cycle! A sort of massage, going round and round. I relaxed and used it as practice for hypnotherapy visualisation.

However, afterwards my cervix did feel a bit tender and my prelabour became stronger, more crampy and harder to deal with. I was so sure this had worked, when I had my regular nightly runs of ctx at 5 mins apart, I called my poor midwife out, and she waited patiently, but as it got light it was clear things were tailing off yet again. She offered me a check and another sweep, as I was really fed up, and this time the sweep was more sore and uncomfortable.

Anyway, next night it all kicked off again and this time it was for real. But throughout I felt like it was hard to relax and get 'in the groove' with my hypnotherapy, which I'd used very successfully last time. I really do think the contractions felt more sort and uncomfortable – OK maybe it was in my head, but it seemed to me that my cervix was sort and when a contraction caused the baby's head to press down, it was harder for me to welcome that feeling than I had expected. It was more painful – not awful, but whereas I've always felt that contractions were doing work, this was a bit like doing work on a sore muscle. Bear in mind this was my 6th labour and I know they're all different, but I do think those contractions felt different.

Once I moved on from prelabour to established labour it was pretty quick, though – maybe 2 hours – but that totally discounts the last day or so of hugely uncomfortable, regular contractions! So, I reckon it served me right and I should have stuck with what I had always suggested to everyone else, which is just to be patient and wait until your body and your baby get it together. And I had less excuse than more, because I had a wonderful midwife who I knew well, and who would never have put any pressure on me for induction unless she had a genuine concern – she's not a clock-watcher. - Angela Horn