

# Pre-natal class teaches all aspects of pregnancy

By ROSEMARIE ROSE  
City Reporter

Having a baby isn't as simple as it used to be.

In this age of medical super-technology, what used to be one of the most natural events in a person's life has become one of the most complicated, especially for the parents. In fact, childbirth has become so complicated that many Bryan-College Station area doctors now recommend or require expectant couples to attend pre-natal classes.

Pat Hassell, a "prepared childbirth" teacher, said the purpose of the classes is to educate parents in the options available to them so that they may make informed decisions when it comes to the birth of their child.

Hassell is a member of BABE, the Bryan-College Station Association of Birth Educators, a group of licensed instructors who hold prepared childbirth classes. The six members of the group teach couples about pregnancy and childbirth, what to expect and do during labor and delivery and what choices are available to them as far as how the actual childbirth is conducted.

The classes are held one night a week for six weeks, and the couple should begin the classes during the mother's seventh month of pregnancy, Hassell said.

"We teach the mothers exercises that are very important during labor," she said, "and we hope they will continue the exercises at least through the last month."

The BABE instructors teach exercises in psychophysical relaxation, a laboring technique similar to the one popularized in the 1950s in the United States as the Lamaze method.

"There are two differences between what we teach and the Lamaze method," Hassell said. The first difference is that Dr. Fernand Lamaze (the obstetrician who developed the method) said there is

absolutely no pain in his method of childbirth, she said. Psychophysical relaxation prepares the mother and helps her stay relaxed during childbirth, but Hassell said there is always pain during delivery.

The second difference is that Lamaze instructors act as the mothers' coaches during labor. The

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method taught in BABE classes has the fathers act as coaches.

Hassell said it would be impractical for her to act as her students' coach because she would have to meet the mother early in the pregnancy in order to get to know her and establish a trusting relationship.

Hassell and her local colleagues, all of whom are women, teach their students breathing and relaxation techniques that will help them and their babies through labor and delivery.

For different stages of labor there are specific types of breathing the mother does during contractions. The breathing techniques, used to insure that both mother and child are receiving enough oxygen, range from deep "cleansing breaths" to shallow pants and puffs.

During a regular class meeting the 12 couples in each group begin by practicing relaxation. They spread out on the floor; the mothers lie on pillows to support their arms and legs. At her coach's order, the mother focuses her eyes on an object or point and concentrates on relaxing. The husband tests each of her

limbs periodically to make sure they are loose.

As the mother is able to maintain her relaxation for longer periods, the husband may instruct her to contract one or two limbs, for instance her right arm and leg. Still focusing, the mother contracts the designated limbs but must keep the rest of her body loose.

While the couples practice, Hassell moves among them bending to test arms and legs and offering words of advice or encouragement.

After relaxation comes breathing practice and then a lecture period.

During the six lectures Hassell gives her students information on everything from hospital policy to what their baby will look like when he is first born.

The members of BABE work closely with the hospital staff at St. Joseph's and the area doctors who perform deliveries. St. Joseph's is the only area hospital with an obstetric section.

Meeting and getting to know all the doctors performing deliveries in the area is one part of an extensive training program an applicant must go through to obtain a license from ASPO, the American Society of Psychophysicals in Obstetrics, Hassell said.

People who wish to become birth educators must also pass tests over technical medical information, read and review books on the subject, study and write lesson plans and be approved by state and national boards of birth educators. Hassell said it takes about two years to complete the program.

By working with the doctors and hospital staff, and by making the parents' preferences known to the doctors, Hassell said many changes have been made in hospital policy over the last few years.

Only 2 1/2 years ago fathers could not hold their babies until they were taking the child home, and the mothers were limited to short periods with their child during the day.

Now, said Hassell, parents can elect for their child to "room in" with the mother for their entire stay in the hospital. The baby's crib is left in the mother's room and the father may be with the mother and child as much as he wishes.

Another change brought about by parents' requests is that the father may be present at the delivery. Fathers are still asked to leave if the

mother must have a cesarean section (surgical delivery of the baby through the mother's abdomen), but Hassell said the doctors hold a vote on it every month and she hopes it will change soon.

Hassell, incidentally, maintains more than a professional interest in the local obstetric scene. She first became interested in birth education when she was pregnant with her first child three years ago. Now that she is expecting again in June, she and her husband plan to teach a class together toward the end of her pregnancy.

One especially important subject approached in the lectures is what type of medication the mother may or will have during her labor and delivery.

Hassell outlines the two major types of medications available, analgesics and anesthetics, and lists

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drug names and side effects involved in the medications.

Very few women, only about 10 percent, go through the entire labor and delivery without any medication for pain, Hassell said. Most women who do take some drug, however, take only a mild anesthetic, demerol.

Hassell says the parents are provided with such detailed information because it is "their labor" and the ultimate decision as to how it should go belongs to the people most directly involved, the parents. Couples are urged to talk with their doctors and ask questions when they don't understand or agree with his practices, she said.

To further educate expectant parents, BABE offers tours of St. Joseph Hospital, where they visit the labor and delivery rooms, post partum (after delivery) rooms and the nursery.

BABE also shows two films on the second Wednesday of every month. One film shown every month is a case history of a pregnancy and delivery. The other film may cover one of a wide range of topics including nutrition, parenting, pre-natal care and the minor discomforts of pregnancy.

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United Press International  
Inflation could hit consumers a second time when they retire, because too few people are putting enough money aside to account for rising costs.

A survey by the Investment Company Institute, the national association of mutual funds, said Monday one in four American men with a median income of just under \$27,000 is saving less than 2 percent of his money, even though almost all believe inflation will rise between 5 and 20 percent in the 1980s.

"If prices do go up at the rate they expect, people will find it increasingly difficult to save enough to guard against the decline in purchasing power," the Institute said.

"Thus, the customary jolt of retirement will coincide with a marked reduction in standards of living."

Even if inflation drops to 7 percent a year, the purchasing power of any income will drop by half in 10 years, the survey said.

The survey advises starting early and investing regularly.

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