Lotus Birth.

The term lotus birth conjures up images of exotic locations with sacred pools adorned with beautiful lotus flowers for women to give birth in. So is lotus birth as spiritual as it sounds?

Lotus birth is the practice of not cutting the cord at birth and keeping the baby attached to the placenta until it naturally separates from the baby’s belly button at around 3-5 days. It is also referred to as umbilical (cord) nonseverence.

Prior to the seventies when the ritual gained popularity with humans it was mainly associated with chimpanzees. In 1974 a Californian woman named Clair Lotus Day questioned the routine cord cutting at birth and became interested in the practices of the chimpanzees. When pregnant with her son, Clair found a sympathetic Doctor who supported her decision to take him home from hospital with his cord uncut and the placenta still attached. Lotus Day concluded that her son seemed a lot more content because he felt secure still attached to his cord and placenta.

In the United States the Janine Parvati Baker described the lotus births of her own babies in her book Prenatal Yoga and Natural Birth. Parvati saw the ritual of lotus birth as the practical application of the yogic beliefs and teachings; Ahimsa which is non-violent thought and action and the core yoga teaching that “all attachments will fall away of their own accord”.

There is very little information on the benefits of the practice from a medical point of view. Fans of lotus birth say that the baby is much more relaxed and peaceful and less likely to have the normal weight loss in the first week of life. They argue that routine cord cutting is purely for cosmetic reasons and represents a disruption to normal family bonding. Lotus birth appears to be a reaction against the routine and hurried cutting of the cord and the active management that currently takes place at most births. By keeping the placenta attached there is a slowing of all events after the birth creating a reverence and stillness around the baby, which allows for a peaceful transition and adaptation to the world. In Australia it is women who give birth at home and a small minority of the women that birth in hospital who practice lotus birth.

How do you do it?
When the baby is born instead of cutting the cord it is left intact. When the placenta is born it is kept level with the baby to encourage full transfer of the nutrient rich blood to the baby. Initially the placenta is wrapped in a soft cloth or placed on a towel that assists in absorbing some of the fluid. A while after the birth the placenta is prepared by wiping excess blood and fluid from the outside and sprinkled with salt. It is then wrapped in a special cloth (some women use a disposable nappy inside the cloth) with a space left for the cord attached to the baby. Some people also wrap the cord with silk or cotton ribbon. The baby now has a placental pillow that needs to be carried wherever she goes. The baby is bathed as normal with the placenta nearby. The cord can get wet as it easily dries again but the placenta is kept dry. Every day or so the placenta is unwrapped and wiped.
Shea Caplice  July 2007

dry and coated with the salt again to preserve it. Normally the cord dries and separates at around 3-5 days after the birth but sometimes it will take longer. Once the placenta is separated the parents may bury it and plant a tree on it in honour of the baby. Some parents get a homeopathic placental remedy made which is specific for that baby and can be given to the baby at other times that involve letting go such as weaning, the birth of siblings, first day of school etc.

Jane Collings a homebirth midwife has cared for many women who have had a Lotus Birth. She says, “One of the benefits of a lotus birth is that it ensures some quiet days after the birth with visitors limited to like minded supportive family and friends that are not confronted by the ritual of keeping the placenta attached. In a lotus birth the family are caring for the baby’s placenta in a much more reverent way than in non-lotus births. The lotus babies I have cared for seem to have a calmer first few days”.

April Love mother of three girls Iris 6 yrs, Mini 5yrs and Cedar 3yrs found out about lotus births through her yoga teacher when she was pregnant with Mini. “I bought the book *Lotus Birth* and I really connected with the idea. When Iris, my first born had her cord cut after the birth she cried and it was really noticeable and that did not seem right”. After researching further and finding a supportive midwife April decided to have a lotus birth. “We did not use the salt as we wanted to make a remedy from the placenta so we just washed it each day with water and wrapped it in a cloth nappy with a few drops of lavender oil. The placenta stayed attached for 9 days but it seemed right for Mini. She seemed calmer and had none of the nervousness I had noticed in our first born. The lotus birth seemed to create a much more content baby. So I did it again with Cedar and she was calm as well. The other girls were reluctant to pick her up with the placenta attached so there was the added benefit of that slow transition for them. It was nice because they just lay around with her and watched her rather than wanting to carry her all the time. I think lotus birth is fantastic and I would support anyone doing it. Even 24 hours of non-separation of the cord allows some time for the baby to adjust and let go of the placenta. ”

If you want to have a lotus birth it is advised that you discuss your wishes with your caregivers so that they are aware of your plans before the birth. The lotus birth practice is not harmful to your baby but as the practice is not widespread you may receive some very odd reactions to the concept so be prepared with some written information on the practice so that you can educate them in advance. No matter where you have your baby it is your right to choose and have a say in how things are done. Even if you have a caesarean you can have a lotus birth but in the rare event that the baby has the cord so tightly around her neck at birth that it needs to be cut a lotus birth will not be possible.

The important thing where birth plans are concerned is not to be imprisoned by your plan and go with the flow!

Further information:
Lotus Birth by Shivam Rachana (Greenwood Press)
Lotus Birth information pack available from [www.freestone.org](http://www.freestone.org)
[www.lotusbirth.com](http://www.lotusbirth.com)