

(introductory music)

DISCLAIMER: *Taking Back Birth* is a production of the Indie Birth Association and indiebirth.com. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, everyone. Maryn here with a pregnancy topic today that I think is a lot of fun and comes up a lot in discussions that I know I have both personally online. Most recently in one of our free consults which prompted me to want to talk about it today. Because the topic is all about why and how pregnancies are so different or can be so different for the same woman. Of course, the differences really extend most of the time not only through the pregnancy but through labor and birth as well. That's why birth stories are so fascinating to read, right? Even your own. Going back and reading those and comparing them to what you might anticipate or what just happened. And if you haven't had a baby before, you know you can spend all day and really no two stories will be the same.

So whether it's your first pregnancy compared to your second or you're comparing your fourth pregnancy to your third or maybe you've had ten babies and now this eleventh baby is just so different. The pregnancy experience is something you've never had before. Or maybe you've had a loss. And now with your current pregnancy, everything feels different, and you're scrutinizing everything. So there's so many scenarios we can find ourselves in when we really are comparing and we're looking for validation. We're looking for support. I think this starts, at least for me, before I even know that I'm pregnant or maybe I kind of suspect it. But I'm certainly not alone in that. Many of you know I'm sure or maybe are the same way. That online, for example, there are just millions of pages out there about women logging their pregnancy symptoms and trying to guess when their—when they got pregnant or if they're pregnant.

I think the general theme for pregnancy is, "Am I normal? Is this normal? Is what I'm experiencing normal or typical?" And that's just kind of what we're going to be exploring today because there's not really always an answer to that question. I think there definitely are things that are more typical. And let's say even with early pregnancy symptoms. There seems to be at least a couple, right? That are kind of across the board. But then there's so many. You could virtually have anything as a pregnancy symptom. And that might just be unique to you.

So sense of smell definitely isn't unique. But I know, for me, that's something that always comes to the forefront. Maybe before I even know for sure that I'm pregnant. I remember that starting with my first pregnancy. And, of course, never having been pregnant before, what did I know? But I can still remember the smell of this really icky

soap we had in the kitchen. Now it probably wasn't that icky, but that was a pregnancy symptom for me. So I'm sure way back then, 13 years ago, I probably Googled it and felt like, "Okay. I'm not alone in that. That's a pretty normal thing to have." So, again, if you were to search—and I always like to do that. I kind of like to see what the mainstream view on things is. If you kind of search—what did I put in? This pregnancy feels really different or something along those lines. And there are literally pages of message boards and articles of women saying, "Yes. It's different this time," whatever that means. And the articles are really less about what makes it different although some of the mainstream articles really do try to predict. And I think that's just where a lot of women's comfort lies. They're not happy with the, "Well, they're all different. Let's just kind of feel it and be with it," thing. They want an article that says, "Oh, yeah. Your back is going to hurt more the second time." Literally. Just read this on babycenter.com. And, "Oh, yes. Your varicose veins will be worse the more pregnancies you have."

So there's definitely a need to put our pregnancies in a box. And that's not too surprising. We talk a lot about labor and birth on these podcasts and just in general. And, obviously, there's a huge need there. And that's kind of a rabbit hole. But rules and regulations around birth. That's the need to control. It's the need to quantify, put something in a box, to understand it. To make it predictable. To make it acceptable. And, again, there's so much of that that starts in pregnancy. And I'm not saying that's bad or good. I'm just saying that seems to be what a lot of women are doing. And a lot of it is really natural I really do think.

So I want to talk a little bit today about that. I'm sure I'll tell a few of my own personal pregnancy stories. Hopefully, that won't bore you. Obviously, I've walked with a lot of women too, and so I may interject some of their stories. But they're just my experiences for the most part. And, again, it's not me saying that your difference is not normal or it is. It's more a sharing. I think this is one of those podcasts that's less about instruction and more about just creating that community that I know I'd like to see, and that you probably want to see. What's more fun, really, than creating connection between women even across the Internet? And kind of telling our stories and listening to other people's stories. And basically what we're doing by doing that is just supporting this idea that birth is awesome. It's mysterious and so is pregnancy. That we don't have to fit into a mold of textbook—or textbook. We don't have to fit into a mold like a textbook definition of pregnancy just like we don't have to fit into that mold for labor and birth for it to be normal or healthy.

So just sharing experiences, I think, is really important. And, again, that's why we're out there reading birth stories. That's why we're out there watching births. And just not as much attention on pregnancy. And a lot of women, especially dependent on their location, I think are feeling pretty alone during pregnancy. So instead of fearing the

differences that we might notice, anything that deviates from what we've experienced before or what we think is somehow normal or typical, I think it's time to make these connections between each other. And also with our own bodies. More of that. And more of connection with our babies. And less reliance, of course, on technology and other people.

So I always give the disclaimer. That doesn't mean those things aren't helpful. But I always like to say if that cannot be the first place that we go. And it can be really hard. And sometimes, there are more emergent situations that would make using technology, of course, more prudent. But in general, especially as we're talking about just noticing differences, how about we consult ourselves first and look inwards and hear from other women, for sure, that, "Oh, yeah. I had a pregnancy like that." Or, "Oh, yeah. By the time you get to your fourth pregnancy, nothing feels like you're used to." Or whatever we need to say from a sincere place in ourselves to support other women. I don't think that's enabling anybody or making it so they can't consult themselves. It's giving them confidence actually. So, hopefully, the rest of this will give you a little confidence, if you're experiencing what feels like a really different pregnancy.

So I'll say, personally, that I don't remember my first and second pregnancies feeling that different. But perhaps I wasn't as tuned in. Now just for fun, the first was a girl, and the second was a boy. So I will say, for me, that whether the baby is a girl or a boy, I haven't noticed any huge differences that I would attribute to that. But that's me. So I got to my third baby, and that was the baby for me that really threw me for a loop. Meaning I felt bigger sooner. Like so many women in this—and I'm not making fun of this because I was totally one of them. Many women by the time they get to maybe even their second or third or subsequent pregnancy, it—things feel really different, and they're convinced that there's more than one because our brain really does try to quantify, try to decipher. And that's just one of the first things that comes up especially if you're feeling bigger. That's everybody's first thought is, "Oh boy. Maybe there's more than one."

Now that's definitely what I thought with my third. And why I felt a lot bigger I don't really know other than my uterus had been through it before. I was a beginning, still pretty beginning midwifery student at the time. So if I had had more midwifery training, I probably would have felt my uterus and said, "Oh, okay. Well, a belly is not a uterus. And a uterus is not a belly. And my uterus feels just right for dates." But who knows why? And I have to give myself credit for just feeling the way I did without having a real physical explanation. So it was at this point too, again, in my midwifery training with my third baby that I came across Anne Frye's midwifery textbook. I had the textbook. It was something I was working and studying at the time. And she actually calls it third baby syndrome in her book. And I found that really amusing.

And, actually, that was a good deal of my solace in feeling supported because I thought, “Oh, okay. I’m not crazy. It’s normal for a third baby to just kind of throw you for a loop.” And I can think of lots of women that feel that way. Something is just different. And it can be you feel smaller. You feel bigger. Maybe the baby is more active. Maybe the baby is less active. Sometimes we can’t even put our fingers on it. We just know that this doesn’t feel like what we’ve experienced before. So since learning about and experiencing third baby syndrome, I can say that we could call it any number baby syndrome. Maybe the third is more common or typical. I don’t know how we could really find that out. But third baby syndrome can be fourth baby syndrome or fifth baby syndrome. And all it really does, I think, is, again, give us more structure to the fact that every pregnancy is different. Every person is unique. And I think it’s just reminding midwives, at least, since this was a—is a midwifery textbook that that’s a thing.

So I’m sure you have all heard of the old midwife or old wives’ tales that are out there. And I think that’s kind of fun. But it also illustrates, again, this need to explain what we’re feeling. And it seems to me a lot of the old wives’ tales—I keep calling them midwife tales. I don’t know. Old wives’ tales about pregnancy and birth center around gender of the baby. So you’ve heard, I’m sure, “Oh, you’re carrying real low. It’s a whatever.” I don’t even know what the myth is. “Oh, you have heartburn. It’s a girl.” So, obviously, this isn’t a new thing, if these are old tales. There’s always been a need—maybe more so in a time when there was an ultrasound perhaps. There’s always been that need to wonder, to ponder, to compare. And, again, I think that’s really normal because pregnancy is a mysterious process. And I think it’s just a normal, natural human desire, again, to want to know more than we can know.

And even know, with ultrasound and with the technology we have, we really can’t know everything. And we can’t know for sure. So something as seemingly simple as finding out the gender of a baby, ultrasound is pretty accurate at a certain gestation. But it’s not 100%. We don’t have anything that’s 100% really telling us what’s going on. And, of course, there’s a newer blood test that allegedly determines gender. And I don’t actually know the statistics off hand of that. My guess would be it’s a lot more accurate. But I just don’t think anything is 100%, right? There’s got to be—there’s got to be some mistakes in there just because—just because.

So anyway, I guess there are more tools nowadays to get some answers about questions like that. But there are certainly things women experience in pregnancy that there’s just no way to find out more. And, again, maybe it’s just a feeling. So let’s see. Oh, I was kind of thinking of an analogy. I don’t know if this will be helpful or not because we’re probably all on the same page. It’s not really that complicated of a topic. But I was a musician before I got involved in the birth world. So I spent 15 years of my life doing that professionally. And when I think about pregnancy now, I can’t help but compare it to an artistic process. I guess just being an artist myself at the cord that’s

how I see it. It's not just unique. It's a different work of art. Each and every time. Each and every person. And I was thinking about how when I was a musician you practice for hours and hours. And you might have to play the same piece of music twice in a row. Maybe Saturday and Sunday or whatever it is.

And no matter how hard you could possibly try, there is no way you could duplicate what you did on Saturday on Sunday. There's just no way because we're human. And, obviously, pregnancy is a lot more complicated than that. And we have the DNA, which is obviously a huge difference and a scientific reason why we're all unique. But then I think there's all these other factors that we can't measure whether it's spiritual or emotional. There are different ways, I believe, that we prepare during pregnancy to parent the soul that is coming in. So to me, pregnancy is the ultimate creative process. And that helps me just personally even as I've experienced, just like you, differences from pregnancy to pregnancy. And I look at my children from the ages of whatever. Almost 13 to 1. And I could spend a long time, if I were to write down on paper, how different each of them were whether it was just base physical differences. And, again, emotional differences. Maybe even when they started to talk or walk or lose teeth. Again, we just can't underestimate the uniqueness of each soul. So why would we expect each pregnancy to be the same? Other than, again, it's not something we're really sharing and talking about.

So how different can pregnancies be? I think they can be as different as night and day. Some women don't experience morning sickness at all with one. And with the next one they're terribly sick. So physically, we can just have really big changes. One of the most common things that seems to come up is when you can feel the baby move. And I think it's just the more times you experience it the more time—the more chances you have of it being different. So first off, there's just the practicality of dates. Not everybody knows when they conceived. Even if you have an idea, you don't know exactly when it happened. I mean that's just impossible. You might have a range of a couple days. So there's just that difference that's purely mathematical as to when you would feel a baby move.

And then there's some other just clinical differences. So let's say a placenta was on the front of your uterus or on your belly side, anterior, then, theoretically, that can make it harder to feel the baby earlier. So where the baby is at can really change that. How busy someone is in their life if they have other kids, if they're working a lot. Sometimes it's just a matter of focus. And that's also a really common thing as pregnancies go on for women that they sort of start to pay attention later. And I mean I've certainly experienced that. When you have one kid or you have two or three or four or five and you get pregnant again, it's just normal and acceptable that you can't sit around and just be pregnant. I mean life calls. And often you just aren't completely tuned in especially in early pregnancy. And you might miss the baby moving.

And then, of course, there's just the mystery. Why would one baby be able to be felt in the same woman's body much later or earlier than another? There really is no explanation. So I know, for me, the earliest I ever felt one of my babies move was my second. My first son. And I will never forget—and this was almost 11 years ago. 14 weeks. And my first baby was certainly not that early. So at 14 weeks, I literally felt him knock which sounds hilarious. And he went on to be probably the most active baby I had. And he's a really active boy. Always moving. Really athletic. So who knows if that had something to do with it? But distinctly remember a knock, knock feeling at 14 weeks. And then he probably quieted down for a week or two. But then was moving quite regularly a lot earlier than I had experienced.

So fast forward to my last, which was my seventh, and still nothing at 14 weeks which really is normal. But when you've experienced it, then you tune in and you think, "Is this normal? Is it normal for this baby?" 15 weeks. 16 weeks. 17 weeks. Still not very much although maybe I had felt just a little something something at 15 or 17 weeks. But it was not a bold knock like he had done at 14 weeks. And I remember feeling something and not really even knowing if that was her. So at 18 weeks, I remember being kind of worried. Like this seemed late for me. I had felt that something and now really nothing. And so I laid down with my fetoscope. And, of course, at 18 weeks, you can feel—not baby parts, but you can feel that there's something in your uterus. And so I put the fetoscope down, and she kicked it. Like I heard the kick and I felt the kick. And I just laughed. And I said, "Thank you, baby. I was getting worried, and you probably knew that. So thanks for entertaining my worry."

But really, if pregnancies can be that different just as far as movement goes, and that's me and seven babies, then yes. Really. They can be different. So another thing that comes up is just belly size. And I kind of touched on that with telling you about my third. But I'll just say it again because it's just really, really, really, really, really, really common. So there is your belly, which I don't know what other word to use, right? Your uterus starts out in your pelvis when you're not pregnant and when you're early pregnant. And then the uterus rises out of the pelvic cavity into the abdominal cavity. So when you're poking around on your belly, you are feeling for your uterus. You're not going to be able to feel a baby in early pregnancy. And in fact, like I just said, in early pregnancy, like before 12 weeks, you're not really going to feel a uterus either. But my point is when you are able to feel you are feeling for the borders of the uterus and maybe you're measuring or whatever.

But many women in subsequent pregnancies just—their actual belly, their actual abdominal muscles are more lax. And so when they're standing maybe looking in a mirror, they feel like, "Oh my gosh. This belly is twice the size at 15 weeks than it was last time." I'm saying that it can look that way, and it can feel that way. But when you lay down and you actually feel your uterus and if there is some magical you could

compare pregnancies that way, you'd see that they—your uterus was probably the same unless you really did have, maybe, more than one baby which, of course, definitely isn't everybody. But, again, that's just a really common thing to look pregnant earlier, to wonder how many are in there, and, usually—usually, that question is answered pretty easily by just feeling the uterus.

Now what can happen with subsequent pregnancies is that you do measure or feel a tiny bit bigger especially early pregnancy than you maybe did a couple pregnancies ago. So I always just kind of do a wait and see, and that's what I would suggest to most women. Don't freak out and think you have twins at 16 weeks just because you're measuring more like 20. Just kind of give it some time. By 28 to 30 weeks, you'll probably be right on track assuming there is one. And you just chalk that up again to differences in your body mostly. So this is something that may not resonate with everybody just depending on your own spiritual or religious beliefs. But I do think that there's a major difference or has been for me in when the soul of the baby actually comes into its body.

So some people, some cultures even, believe that at conception there is a soul there. Certainly not arguing with that. It's just that, for me, that hasn't been across the board experience. I can remember with my fifth baby being pregnant for a couple months at least. I think I was 20 weeks when I literally felt her come into her body. I don't know how else to explain it. Before then, I just kind of felt like I was pregnant. I definitely felt her moving, but I didn't feel a strong connection. And I was kind of waiting to feel that and feeling like there was nothing else for me to really do except wait. So I will never forget this either. We were at the birth of a very good friend. And she didn't know if she was having a girl or a boy, but she ended up having a girl. And really at that moment or right after her birth as I was in her house cleaning up, I really felt my baby come—came in. And I didn't know mine was a girl for sure either. But I was pretty sure at least intuitively. So that was really cool.

And others of mine have felt like they've come in earlier. And to me, that feels like a connection. It feels like I'm getting to know somebody rather than just being pregnancy. I don't know if that helps. Let's see. My fourth baby was quite an enigma and still is. He's six. Very, very strange pregnancy. The strangest of all the pregnancies I've had. Now physically didn't really feel that different. I don't think I probably looked any different but emotionally and spiritually was completely different. It was really hard to get a connection to him even though he was moving. He didn't move as much as the other babies had. And I distinctly remember kind of freaking out. And I don't remember in pregnancy. I'm guessing probably around 30 weeks.

I remember freaking out to my husband that I thought something was wrong. And I hadn't gotten an ultrasound in years and years and never really would consider it, but I

was considering it. I was considering seeing if there was anything to see because I couldn't put my finger on what was different about him. And, of course, being a midwifery student doesn't really help because there's all kinds of really awful things you can read about. So I was just very conflicted. And I remember my husband really talking me out of the ultrasound, which I'm very grateful for, because it forced me to just spend time with myself and not to force a connection with this baby because I really couldn't do that. But just to connect enough to realize that whatever I was feeling wasn't physical. And I think that's just a really, again, human, common thing to do. When we notice something different, we think there is a problem. And the best way for our brains to wrap around it is to think, "Oh, there is something wrong with this baby. Something physically wrong," which, of course, does happen. But for as many women as might think it, it's not that common. Thank goodness.

So it was my personal experience with that because, again, I really took what I was feeling emotionally and spiritually and I tried to make sense of it. And that was the best I could do. There must be something wrong with him. Well, there was and is nothing physically wrong with him. But he had a very adventurous birth. And he is a very different child. Really unlike all of my others. And that's not a bad thing but totally and completely manifested in his pregnancy. It was really, like I said, like no other.

So, hopefully, that helps just to share a couple things with you. Oh, I have another sort of story. Just a friend of mine that was having her, I think, fifth or sixth baby. And unassisted pregnancy, unassisted birth, so I was a friend just listening which is wonderful too. And the whole pregnancy she just kept saying, "Something is different. Something is different. Something is different." And such a wonderful, intuitive woman was able to decipher for herself what that meant. I mean she didn't know, but she also didn't think there was a real urgent problem. She just knew that she had been pregnant a bunch of times, and this one was definitely different. So I very much admire her because she didn't seek to get any outside information. I think it would have been really hard, to be honest, for me just to kind of sit with that the whole pregnancy and never really make peace with what was going on or if things were okay although I knew she thought things were okay. Her best guess was maybe that there was more than one because she felt just so different physically as well. And the short story is she ended up birthing a breech baby quite easily by herself. And so whether or not that was even the answer, I don't know that I could say. Maybe she would say that that was definitely part of what felt different but maybe not. Maybe the breech was just this whole different personality, this whole different way of coming into the world that this baby had from the very beginning.

So, again, we don't always know, and we may never know even for ourselves how to interpret what we're feeling. We may never make sense of why. But if we're going to stay on the turning inwards and working on our intuition, then I think it's a great time to

do that. And I always say that birth or undisturbed birth or really being in touch during our birth process doesn't just appear for most women. It is an actual skill that needs to be worked on for most of us. So during pregnancy, I think we really are given what we need. And like I've shared with you, some of my experiences have really made me kind of go deeper into myself to really get more in touch with my intuitive side to really find a way to connect with the baby so that I felt like I had some more answers. And I think that's what we're called to do with these different pregnancies.

I think we're called to share our experiences like we've talked about. I think we're called to support other women just in the glory and mystery of the process and not try and fix it for everyone. I can certainly get into that too. It's like, "Oh, it might be this. It might be that. It might be this." But really I think most of us just need a listening ear when we're pregnant whether it's about how different this pregnancy is or whether it's about emotional issues we're having. Most of us just like to be listened to. And it's not generally something to solve. So I think as we go through pregnancies especially when things are feeling different then we ask ourselves, like I shared with you, is this a problem? Or is this just a difference?

We can, obviously, consult others. We can just share with our friends and our partners maybe. We certainly can, like I said, consult with others maybe midwives. Have someone put their hands on our bellies. Do they feel anything different? Are we measuring that far ahead? But ultimately, again, I believe it's just a chance to connect, and it's a way to prepare us for the different experience that is coming because, like I said, labor and birth are no exception. That certainly wasn't the subject of this podcast. But none of mine have been the same. None of my births have been the same. And it allows us the chance to develop our own connection, our own intuition because ultimately that's all we can depend on. And I always say the same thing whether or not we hire someone to be at our birth, great. Whether we hire someone to help us with prenatal care, great. Doesn't matter really. All of those things can be a wonderful support. But I really believe that the number one thing we have to do is be with ourselves and ask ourselves the big questions. And then we are even more open to the support of others.

So thanks so much for joining me. That was kind of a fun one to talk about. Be sure to sign up for a free consult, if you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant or just want to talk about something birth related. They are 20-minute consults every Monday. You can sign up on our site. And thanks again for listening.

(closing music)