Sheridan Hathaway: After Birth

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IN THIS EPISODE

Sheridan Hathaway returns to Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC to share the rest of her pregnancy and the birth story of her second baby — the birth she so carefully prepared for as a home birth after cesarean. Part 2: after birth.

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Welcome to the Informed Pregnancy and Parenting Podcast. I'm your host, pregnancy-focused chiropractor Dr. Elliott Berlin. Today we have a follow-up episode with a guest who recently gave birth to her second child. She joined us previously when she was 39 weeks pregnant preparing for a home birth after cesarean, HBAC. Now she's back to share the rest of her pregnancy and birth story. Sheridan Hathaway, welcome back to the podcast.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Hi, thank you so much for having me back.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh my goodness. I can't wait to hear all the details. Congratulations.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Thank you so much. Thank you.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: You've had the child. You've made it. You're smiling.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yes. Happy mama here.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Ah, let's go back to 39 weeks when I left you. And if you haven't listened to that episode, definitely listen, because this will make a lot more sense, listeners. But 39 weeks is when I left you. How was the rest of your pregnancy?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: It was good. I was definitely getting a little more uncomfortable. It was hard to put on my shoes, put on socks, move around with my almost two-year-old. I have an older son as well. But other than that, I was feeling great. I was, you know, still coming in to see you for sessions on a weekly basis. And so, yeah, 39 weeks, I was feeling good. I was just very ready, very

ready physically and emotionally and mentally.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Were you doing anything to try to coax the little bugger out?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: I was just remaining active. You know, I was continuing to see you. I was seeing Jason with the acupuncture. Other than that, I was just kind of letting things progress naturally.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Let's talk about your birth team just as a recap. You were going to be there.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: And your partner, you had a midwife and a doula. Anybody else? Well, my mom also was included on everything. And she also was very much a part of my first pregnancy and birth as well. So, yes, this time she and my partner were a part of it, in addition to our midwife and doula.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. So at what point did labor start?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: So four days after our due date, the contractions started around midnight. I decided to labor on my own on our closet floor until the early morning so that my partner could get a good night's sleep and not be too worried about me before, you know, I really started transitioning into active labor.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow. In those early searches, where did you feel them and what kind of pattern?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: They were sort of few and far between. Like maybe it was probably like every hour or so, if I'm remembering correctly. And I remember it just feeling it wasn't particularly strong. It was just sort of like a lot of discomfort, but something that I was very much able to kind of work my way through on my own without a problem. So once an hour at midnight, is that you falling asleep in between and then it wakes you up? Yes. Yeah, exactly. Feeling tired, luckily able to get some sleep in between. But yes, they would wake me up again and I would just sort of try to focus on my breathing and relaxation while letting those, you know, contractions flow through me. Exciting.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Very exciting. Yes. Yes. And it actually was oddly magical to kind of have that time to myself to sort of mentally prepare. And I literally did it on our closet floor, like in a very, very dark space and it felt incredibly comforting. And I feel like most people would hear that and go, that seems very uncomfortable, but I laid like a couple towels down and just sort of relaxed on the floor. And it was rather nice, actually. I was just so excited that everything had finally started and was progressing.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: That reminds me of the cat giving birth. Yeah, exactly. A warm, cozy, private space. Yes.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: And then that went on until morning? Yes. So in the morning, obviously, I informed my husband of what was going on. In fact, I think I told him in the middle of the night and he, you know, wanted to be there for me, but I really said, you know, I'm totally fine. You get sleep. I'll be in the closet. But in the morning.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I'm just thinking, how big is the closet? What does that mean, be there for you? Is it

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: going to be on a shelf? No, I could definitely, you know, lie down totally straight. You know, I'm 5'5", so it's about six feet in length. So it's

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: comfortable enough. For you, but with your partner in there.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Right. Exactly. Because he's 6'3", so that would not have been ideal. So in the morning, I continued going through contractions through mid-afternoon. And then by mid-afternoon, the contractions started getting more intense. And then at one point, I went up to our bedroom and started laboring there around 2pm. I was sort of wandering around the house up until that point. I spent a lot of time outside walking around. It was actually really lovely to experience that early labor, sort of wandering around at ease. But then once he started to feel more intense, I did sort of want to be in a smaller, more intimate setting. So I did hunker down in our bedroom. And then around 3.30, 4 o'clock that afternoon, the contractions were definitely getting

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: more intense. And it was obvious that I had started active labor. And so my husband then called our doula around that time and consulted with her. I kept trying to sort of push off having her arrive because I didn't feel like I really needed her there. I really wanted her to come when I really felt like I needed her to help me breathe through each contraction. And so she didn't arrive until about 5.30 that afternoon. So during this time, actually, my brother had flown down from Oregon. He lives in Eugene, Oregon. So he had flown down to help with all of this. So he was helping with my almost two-year-old. My dad was helping. My mom was helping. They were all kind of helping off and

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: on up until when the contractions started getting really intense. And then at that point, my mom and husband were really more focused on me as opposed to my son.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: So everybody was in the house?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Everyone was in the house. Yes. He was a party.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How did your son react to you surging?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: He was okay with it. I think he's incredibly sensitive. So he was just very loving and obviously concerned. But once I started really progressing into active labor, what I found is that I really wanted to be by myself with as few people as possible in our bedroom. So that did exclude him. So he just enjoyed lots of time with his uncle and grandpa.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, that sounds lovely too.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yeah. Yeah.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Okay. So you're in your bedroom with now your partner, your mom, and your doula.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yeah. So our doula arrived around 5.30 that afternoon. And at that point, she was really helping to remind me to breathe slowly through each contraction, softening, releasing

any tension. And she was just such an incredible asset during that time because I actually chose not to work with a doula with my first pregnancy. And in hindsight, I can say at least for myself, a doula was an absolute game changer. And she was just so beneficial throughout the entire process in lending support, not only to me, but also to my husband and my mom.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah, that's interesting. I remember our first birth too, is the doula was primarily supporting my wife, but also took on the secondary role of making me feel comfortable and also giving me tips like, hey, go do this. If this could be helpful, this could be comforting to her. It just made me feel very relaxed and as if I was being helpful. Jury's out. Okay. If that was her role, what was the role for your partner and your mom?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: So my mom has pretty much always been my best friend. We share such a close relationship and so she has just always been there with me through all the ups and downs, including pregnancy and birth. And so it was very important to me to have her be present for that. I would say in terms of direct help, my partner probably did more just simply because I did not let the poor guy leave my side for even a minute while I was going through contractions. And the same thing was true for my first birth. I just really felt like I needed him there for the emotional support, for the physical support. While experiencing active labor, I was pretty much leaning on him or having him help me physically throughout

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: every single contraction. And I do remember Dr. Boleyn, he left the room for it must have been like five minutes to let our doula and midwife in. And I knew when he was gone and I was begging for him to come back. So I'm just so madly in love with him. And he really, really helped me so much throughout the process. Yeah. Again, like the doula just reminding me to soften my body and relax. And it just really helps or did help, especially for me to have that constant reminder through every single contraction, even when there's thousands. I don't know if I'm doing this right, but I feel like saying hashtag relationship goals. I am very, very lucky. He is incredibly loving and supportive.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Ah, that's so wonderful. Before we take a quick break at this point, do you have a recollection of the timing of the contractions and, or, you know, how they might've changed in intensity or location?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: To be honest, it was so much of a blur and the majority of my recollection has come from the detailed notes my husband gave me. I am not going to lie about that. Because as I will share a little bit later, things progressed in an unexpected way. And so it really seems like a

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: blur. What a great cliffhanger. Let's take a break and we'll be right back. four times, and brand D four times. Welcome back. We are talking to Sheridan Hathaway. So labor starts around midnight. You're in the closet for a while, having a surge every hour. And then by morning, things pick up a little bit. Big family party. Everyone's there. You're taking in nature. And then things pick up by around 5.30 p.m. Your doula comes and your partner and your mom are supporting you closely. What happens next? Yeah, so contractions

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: were definitely becoming more and more frequent to the point where they were, you know, about every couple of minutes or so. And so as a result of that, it seemed as though

things were progressing along rather well. Obviously, contractions were getting stronger and closer together. And so we had our midwife arrive around eight o'clock. And at that point, after she arrived, we started inflating the pool in our bedroom. And I labored in the pool for a while. Actually, prior to that, I also did a lot of laboring in our shower. To me, it only seemed like a matter of minutes. But according to everyone else, I was in the shower for a number of hours. And it was so wonderful. A multi-hour shower. Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Oh. Is it the water? Is it the heat? A combination?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yeah, a combination of both. I think primarily the water, feeling the water hitting my body, acted as a very good distraction and just sort of helped me relax through each of those intense contractions. But yeah, so at that point, I was laboring in the pool and our midwife decided to see how far along I was. So she checked to see how dilated I was. And I had asked her a while back to please not tell me how far I was dilated because I remember with my first son, when I found out how far along I was, I just felt totally defeated. I think that's very typical of your first birth. You think you're experiencing a lot of pain and you think you're close to 10. I'm ready to push in you too.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Right. Exactly. And I was told, oh no, you're only like three centimeters. So I was trying to avoid a similar situation this time around. And so our midwife did not share that information with me, nor with my husband and my mom who were also in the room. However, she went outside of our bedroom and started chatting with our doula. Now she and our doula have worked very, very close with one another for a number of years and know each other very well. And it was very obvious when they left the room that something was not necessarily going as planned or things weren't progressing as expected. And at this point, I was experiencing extreme, extreme pain. I was trying to labor in the inflatable pool for as long as

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: I could. And prior to that, I actually labored on our bed for at least an hour and a half or so changing positions to get the baby into a better position to kind of come down. And nothing seemed to be working. I was in so much pain and I was starting to feel as though I was exhausting my options from a pain standpoint. And that was really troubling for me. But at the same time, I didn't want to know how far along I was dilated because I didn't want to start feeling down if it was a lot less than I had hoped. So basically, after laboring in the pool and after her checking my cervix again, she, meaning our midwife, informed me that I had an extremely swollen cervix, which was what was leading to the immense, immense pain.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I was curious, where was the intense pain? Where did you feel it?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: At this point, Dr. Berlin, I started feeling like I was having to push the baby out. So I was having feelings of pushing at this point. So it was

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Was it possible that you were pushing, even though the cervix wasn't fully open?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yes. Yes, exactly. So my body was trying to push the baby out and my cervix was not fully open. And it was causing, you know, extreme swelling around my cervix. So I was being told to relax and not push and wait for my body to be fully dilated. But it was telling me

otherwise. So it was very troubling at this point. And I just felt that after all of these hours of going through labor, I just wasn't sure how much longer I could withstand this pain. And so at that point, we were conferring about what to do. And ultimately, I decided that I needed to go to the hospital to get an epidural because I couldn't imagine being without pain relief for another two, three, four hours, however long it would take to get

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: the baby out. And, you know, our midwife and doula really agreed with my decision to do that because of the swelling. And I think the biggest thing that was concerning for myself, my husband and my mom is that they seemed concerned given the situation of the swelling and the fact that I had been in active labor for so long.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: I mean, I guess one wonders if you can't not push against that cervix that's swelling, then it just, instead of going seven, eight, nine, 10, you go the other way, 10, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four. And, you know, in those cases, an epidural can certainly help you relax, open up and not push and let your cervix cut down. So it sounds pretty reasonable. But one also wonders, were you nervous about going to the hospital because you're trying

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: for a V-back? Yes. So at the same time, I'm glad you brought that up. I'm recognizing that I absolutely need the pain relief, which was a disappointment because I really wanted to have an unmedicated home birth. That was my ultimate goal. But what I recognized, and I was, you know, very quickly able to let go of this because I was in so much pain, is that I went for quite a long time unmedicated. And ultimately, we ended up leaving for the hospital. I think we left the house at around 10, 20 p.m. And the reason that number sticks in my mind is because my husband plugged the directions to the hospital in our GPS and it was showing 15 minutes and he got us there in something like six minutes.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: I was basically doing what I could not to scream, but unfortunately, like screaming in the car, I was in so much pain. And again, my body was trying to push this baby out. I mean, I literally felt like I was going to have the baby in the car.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Trying to picture if you had gotten pulled over at that point.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: But officer. Yeah, I know, I know. It would have been quite the Hollywood scene. So yeah, so we show up at the ER and I'm having the most severe contractions. My sincerest apologies to anyone in that ER waiting room. But I finally get admitted to a room at around 1030. And unfortunately, the anesthesiologist had just gone into the OR with another patient. So I was not able to get an epidural for two hours. Yeah, it was, it was pretty rough. Did they have a shower or a tub? So, you know, I did not use a shower or tub. I was in so much pain. So at this point, my body was everything but relaxed. I was so tense because again, I felt like I was pushing. So I was trying not to push

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: and they were trying to get me to relax on the bed, which was very frustrating for, you know, someone who's in labor and trying to explain to a nurse, like, look, I'm doing everything I can, but my body is trying to push this baby out. And so ultimately what they did, Dr. Berlin, is they gave me turbidol, I believe, to help slow or stop the contractions and benadryl to help with the inflammation of my cervix. And then when I arrived at the hospital, they did check my cervix

and I was a little above seven centimeters. Okay. So you're getting there. Yeah, I was getting there. I was getting there. I was wondering about that. Yeah. And then did that medication make your

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: heart racy? A little bit. Yes. I was so happy to at least have received that because it did help with the pain significantly. I was still having insanely painful contractions, but I was able to work through them a little bit better. And so at this point, they're just still trying to help me relax and not push because the more my body is pushing, the more inflamed and swollen my cervix is becoming. So yeah, it was a bit complicated. And then finally, I was able to be seen by the anesthesiologist. I got an epidural shortly after midnight, I think around actually 1230. And then I tried to rest for a little while after that. Did they check you again before? No, they did not check me again. And I think

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: the reason they didn't check me was because it was so incredibly painful every time they checked me. So I believe that's why they didn't do the second check at that point before the epidural. Did it kick in quickly? Yes, thank goodness. Yes, the epidural kicked in rather quickly. And I was able to rest. And then, of course, at that point, I can't feel anything. I can't feel any contractions. I really cannot feel anything whatsoever. So around 1am, they started giving me Pitocin to start up the contractions again. So brake pedal, gas pedal. Right. Exactly. Exactly. Which is, you know, very much expected once you kind of go down that route. Yeah. So before we take one more break,

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: what is the sensation? I know it was very relieving to get out of all that intense discomfort. What is the sensation for you like though? Because you're kind of an active mover. And once you get the epidural, no active moving. So what did that feel like for you? Was it just fine because you wanted the relief? Was there a part of it that was like,

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: ah, I want to move? That's a really interesting question. I think I was so exhausted by everything I had been through prior that at this point, I just wanted the baby out safely. And I wasn't even thinking about being able to move around at that point, because I was concerned about how things were progressing. And I just wanted to make sure that, you know, I got out of everything safely as well as the baby. But I think that actually, the lack of movement due to the epidural bothered me more post-birth as opposed to

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: at that point in time. It makes sense that after 24 hours of moving, it actually might feel good to not move for a minute. And then also your mind is focused on a totally different thing. Let's take one more break and when we come back, we'll get the rest of the story. Welcome back. We're talking to Sheridan Hathaway, mom of two. And where we are in the moment is shortly before the second one arrived. Okay. So at home, plan for home birth. Very intense. Your cervix is swelling. Your body's naturally pushing, even though you're not fully dilated yet. Get to the hospital ready for your epidural screaming at everyone. And the answer is it's tied up for a couple of hours. So they give you the

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: brake pedal drug for your uterus, which is Turbutylene, slow things down, some Benadryl to bring the swelling down at your cervix. You are seven centimeters and then two hours later you do get the epidural. What happens next? Yeah. So at that point, because of

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: the epidural, I wasn't feeling anything. I was further dilated. I'm trying to remember, I believe at that point I was close to 10 because what ended up happening is our midwife has, prior to showing up at the hospital, we had discussed what my options would be if I did have to go to a hospital. And she has a very close connection with an OBGYN who does support VBACs. And so she had been reached out to as we were heading to the hospital and this OB was at the hospital when we arrived. And so I probably should have stated that earlier, but anyways, at this point I was close to 10 centimeters. She had come into the room and was trying to gauge how well I could start pushing.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: And so she basically was, you know, feeling my cervix seemed as though my body was ready. She was feeling the head, but he wasn't really progressing as she had hoped. I know I did try pushing once unsuccessfully. And then after that, our baby's heart rate started slowing substantially, which was causing serious concern. And so ultimately our OB came to us and said, look, your option is we go to the OR, the operating room, and I will do everything in my power to give you a VBAC using a vacuum. But if that is unsuccessful, then the reason I'm going to have you in the OR is because we may have to do an emergency C-section. So at that point, I'm starting to really feel down because my whole goal was to

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: do an unmedicated home birth. And here I am in a hospital heading to the OR and with my previous son, I had to do a C-section. So I wanted a VBAC so desperately. And this to me just felt like, you know, maybe the vacuum will be used, but ultimately it's going to end up in a C-section. But again, at this point in time, all I wanted was to have a healthy, happy baby. So we said, okay, we went to the OR. It feels like you're so close. Yes, I know. I know. So, so close. So ultimately we go to the OR and our OB was so incredibly fantastic. She was unbelievably patient with my body. We just sat in there waiting probably like 30 minutes or so for me to experience a really strong contraction. She kept

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: asking me, what are you feeling? Are you feeling a contraction coming on? And I felt super defeated, Dr. Berlin, because I had this epidural and I just felt numb everywhere. I didn't feel anything whatsoever. So ultimately what she had to do is watch the monitor to see when a contraction was coming along. And she told me when to push. We tried the first time unsuccessfully, but she was able to bring the baby further down and out. And after a second really, really big push, but a short one, she got our baby out successfully. Oh, wow. I mean, you got your baby out successfully too. So I ultimately got my V back. And what I realized upon reflection is that the V back was ultimately the most important thing to me, even above having an

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: unmedicated home birth. I just really, really wanted to have this baby vaginally as opposed to having a C-section. Oh man. What did that feel like when that big, but short push worked and the baby came through? Oh my gosh. There was so much relief, so much relief. And I felt really proud of myself for sticking with my original goal, seeing it through as far as I could in terms of laboring at home. And ultimately what I recognize, which I think we briefly touched on in the before episode is that, you know, I was willing to let things progress in whatever way they needed to, even though it may not necessarily fall in line with my ideal birth. And that's plan a do. Yeah. Yeah. But I always say this is, it's a flow

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: chart. Yes. You're aiming for plan a, but you're steering a hot air balloon. You might end up in a totally different landing pad. Yes, exactly. Wow. Congratulations. That's quite the story. I mean, in unpacking it, is there, well, I have a few questions. First of all, was that last push with a vacuum in the end? Yes. Okay. So it was a vacuum. I said, was there a lot of tearing? There was no tearing. Oh really? That's amazing. No

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: tearing, which everyone was shocked by, you know, I'm no expert, but I can only assume that the reason I didn't tear is because my body was basically trying to push the baby out for so many hours that I feel like things really, really started to stretch. Yeah. Yeah. But who knows? I don't know. How was recovery? Recovery was great. I think as I've explained, I'm a super active person. I love being outside and my midwife, I think a month prior to our due date said, you know, you're going to be laying in bed for a week post-birth, right? And I look at my husband, he laughs. He goes, do you know who you're talking to? She was like, you really need to lay in bed and rest and spend this time to bond with baby.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: And I really took that to heart. I pretty much stayed in bed, getting up very infrequently to roam around our bedroom, maybe downstairs, but it was fantastic. I let my family really nurture me and take care of me and our little one. And it was so, so lovely.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It's really amazing. Sometimes I think that's for active people like you, that's harder.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yes.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Some of the hard parts of labor. A couple of questions. One is any takeaways, things that you learned about you or the birth process or your support people from the experience. And then of course, the final question will be, well, if you did it again, what would you aim for as plan A on the third one?

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Yeah. So I think the whole process for me, what I really learned is that it's so important to just relinquish control when it comes to things like this is you may have a plan, but it's just like parenthood. There are so many things that, you know, come across your path and different hurdles that you have to try to tackle. And so this for me was really a moment in which I recognized like I had this plan and I truly, truly believed that I was going to have an unmedicated home birth, but I ultimately did not. And things still turned out okay. And I'm still very okay with that because I got my V back. And I think ultimately, the biggest thing is even if I didn't get my V back, I ended up with a beautiful,

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: happy, healthy baby. And I am happy and healthy as well. So that is the ultimate dream. It's funny you ask that second question, Dr. Berlin, because my husband has asked me the same thing. And in his mind, he thinks, why would you ever want to go through that much pain again? But I have said I would do it all over again, I would try to have an unmedicated home birth again. And if it comes to being transferred to a hospital, I'm totally fine with that. But I still, you know, even given the amount of pain I experienced, I would still do everything that I did this second. I can't wait for those two podcasts. And it's interesting because I, you know, reflected upon everything quite extensively with

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: our doula and midwife. And they both said, collectively, it was one of the most difficult births to witness, because I was obviously experiencing the most excruciating pain, and I was trying so hard to defeat it and, you know, achieve my ultimate goal of having that home birth. But yeah, I think it's just really important to have a team around you that loves you and supports you and ultimately supports your goal. And that's what my midwife and doula really did for us is they had the resources and the knowledge to recognize, okay, this isn't safe to continue here, but also connecting me with an OB that fully supported VBACs.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It's wonderful. I remember when you even talked about finding your team, you know, just feeling intuitively close, like these were the right people for you. And of course, your family and your partner with the mad love. Sounds like a really beautiful, supported birth experience. I'm happy for you.

SHERIDAN HATHAWAY: Thank you so much. Yes, we are so, so pleased. We have two very happy, beautiful boys.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Sheridan, thanks for sharing your story. And at home, thanks for listening to the Informed Pregnancy podcast. For more pregnancy and parenting information, just like this, visit us online at informedpregnancy.com.

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