



## **Having a baby in France**

- Lorna Well today Spotlight's doing a spot of baby sitting. Today we're meeting Jayne Clubbe and the new addition to the family, baby Erin, in order to discover a little about Jane's experiences of pregnancy, birth and maternity care in France. Well, she's just adorable, swinging on her swing there. How old is she, now Jayne?
- Jayne Uh, she's five months on Sunday.
- Lorna So it's been five very busy months.
- Jayne Very busy, yes.
- Lorna Is she your first baby?
- Jayne She is my first baby, yes.
- Lorna Well, what we'd like to know is, we want some of the procedures and systems that take place in France I mean there must have been a new experience for you, too. So, do you think you could tell us your story just from the beginning, from pregnancy?
- Jayne Well I first had an idea that I was pregnant so I went to the pharmacy, I bought the pregnancy testing kit and that confirmed what we thought so I thought OK what do I do now? Don't panic! The next day I went to the doctor's and he prescribed a blood test so you go to the Laboratoire for analysis to take the blood test. That afternoon I got the results confirmed. So I went back to the doctor's a little bit confused even though they'd actually told me that if I was pregnant I had to ring the hospital and find a gynæcologist myself so that was a little bit of confusion. But I went away and found a gynæcologist in a clinic in St Brieuc, a private clinic. I was originally going to go to a public hospital but some friends recommended this gynæcologist and his clinic because they'd had their children there and they said as an English-speaker it may be better to go to a clinic because I would see the same gynæcologist every month whereas, if I went a public hospital I'm more likely to see different gynæcologists every month and have to explain my situation over and over which could be quite difficult with the language.
- Lorna And was there any difference in the cost implications of this?

Jayne All your costs are reimbursed by CPAM when you're pregnant, 100%. The only thing that costs extra is if you have a private room. If you have a Mutual often some of that cost is covered in the Mutual.

Lorna So you met the gynæcologist for your first examination.

Jayne Yes. I went to see him at 8 weeks. We had a chat, he looked into my background, my history and he gave me a very quick scan just to check that I was actually pregnant. And he gave me some documents to fill in just to make sure you get your costs reimbursed and he prescribed a blood test for a toxoplasmosis. In England I don't think people are screened for it, but it's more common here possibly because people tend to eat more meat uncooked. And it's, if you have already had the toxoplasmosis parasite it is not a problem when you become pregnant but if you contract it while you're pregnant then it can be dangerous for the baby. So at the first meeting they check whether you've got it or not. I was negative, I don't have the parasite. So every month then I had to have a blood test so you become like a pin cushion by the end of the nine months, back and to to the Laboratoire.

Lorna So, do you have to go to the Laboratoire to have those done or do you have a nurse that comes to the house on a morning.

Jayne I had to go to the Laboratoire every month and they gave a book called the Carnet De Santé which you carry with you and you take to every meeting with your gynæcologist and it has all your prescriptions in, all your tests, everything related to your pregnancy.

Lorna Right - and at this point did you have a midwife?

Jayne No. I didn't have a midwife and he didn't mention anything about it so I just assumed that I wouldn't need one but I think you can if you want to.

Lorna So, do you think you just ask for one at the clinic.

Jayne I think it's your responsibility to just look in Yellow Pages.

Lorna Right, the Yellow Pages.

Jayne Just to find a midwife you have to really organise everything yourself.

Lorna So do you feel they took very good care of you?

Jayne Yes, I felt very well looked after had a really good gynæcologist and I felt all along the way that I had a lot of trust in him.

Lorna So what happened when you knew that the birth might be imminent?

Jayne Well, it was a Saturday morning it just came on very suddenly. I'd actually done ante-natal classes, seven of those, and they said if you have contractions every 5 minutes to go to the hospital. When I was sure after a couple of hours that it was definitely contractions we went to the hospital and they asked me get on a bed and put all the monitors on me which is the last thing you want when you're having contractions so I did say. 'can I not go on the bed please', but they did insist so I think it's a little bit more strict than possibly England where you may be able to bounce about on a ball and walk around the room. I think they, uh, here they like to insist you're surveyed a bit more. Then they offered me a bath which I said 'Yes' 'cos it was better than lying on a bed but by then the pain became too bad so I requested an epidural. Actually in the clinic it was an epidural or nothing so there was no gas and air there was no other alternative so that's why I had the epidural.

Lorna So, they offered you no other birthing experiences.

Jayne No

Lorna Not a water bath?

Jayne No, nothing else was offered. Possibly if I'd have asked I'm not sure if it would be available. I don't think it's quite as common in France - there's more and more people who would like it I think but it's possibly more popular in England

Lorna Right. Can I just ask at this point what was the involvement of your husband? Had he been encouraged to be part of the birth process?

Jayne Yeah, he was allowed to be there with me the whole time he was encouraged, he could go to the pre-natal classes if he liked but he didn't bother because none of the other husbands went. He came to one - we had a tour of the hospital which was good before the birth, just so on the day it didn't seem quite so alien.

Lorna And what about the after-care when you come home?

Jayne i actually didn't see anybody at all afterwards. I've since found out that I should have had a midwife come out within the first 12 days. You are entitled to that. I believe somebody from CPAM should have come to the hospital and organised with me but nobody actually came to see me at the hospital I didn't actually see anybody until my first paediatrician meeting which was when Erin was a month old. I did know about the PMI where I could have taken her if I had any concerns as well.

Lorna And was breast-feeding promoted?

Jayne I wouldn't say it was promoted. They just asked which you wanted to do. I did originally say I wanted to breast-feed and they did try and help me. They managed to get Erin latched on and I had a lot of support with that which

was good but I had issues with the milk so I ended up going onto the bottle and they did make sure that I'd made my decision before they let me change so I think they probably did promote it.

Lorna Is there such as a thing as the Congé de Paternité. Is the paternity leave available?

Jayne Yes there is. My partner had two weeks off work with me. I think you can take it anytime you want within the first 6 months.

Lorna How do you apply for that?

Jayne My partner just basically told his work place.

Lorna And are there any other financial entitlements that are available?

Jayne I think you can get maternity pay, because I don't work in France, so it doesn't apply to me. At seven months I got a payment because I'd sent, you send your information to the CAB and they ask you what your salary was, for me it was in 2011, and if it is under a certain amount for joint salaries then you are entitled to a payment in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy and it's quite a substantial payment. It's to help, uh, buy equipment for the baby, it's about 900 Euros I think and then each month after the baby's born you get a payment as well and that's based on the same wages from 2011.

Lorna So, all-in-all, do you think that having a baby in France was a very, was a good experience?

Jayne Yes. I'd say it was a very positive experience. I was obviously very nervous about it at first. Everybody was incredibly kind all along the way. All the midwives and the doctors, I had a lot of trust in all of them and I wouldn't hesitate to have another baby here in France.

Lorna So if you were going to give a word of advice to somebody else who was thinking about having a baby in France, what would you say to them?

Jayne Just say definitely don't worry about it at all. You'll be in very good hands. It's a very good health system. You get a lot of care and a lot of support. Try and get as much information as you can from web sites and from doctors and things.

Lorna Well that's really great. Thank you very much indeed, Jayne for giving us all of that information and I'm sure it's managed to put a lot of people's minds at rest.

