



Birth in Water

Client information leaflet

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What is waterbirth and why should I consider it?

Water Birth is the process of giving birth in water using a deep bath or birthing pool. Being in water during labour is shown to help with easing the sensation of contractions. Women find the water to be more relaxing. The water can help to support your weight, making it easier to move around freely and feel more in control during labour. Most women can choose a water birth. There are just a few medical conditions which would make it unwise.



The warm water can help to relax, soothe & comfort you. Being supported by the water allows you to move freely and explore different positions. Being upright in the water helps to facilitate gravity which in turn enables the baby to move down towards the birth canal. Water can lower your blood pressure and reduce feelings of anxiety, making your body more able to release endorphins, which can help to ease pain.

The water can help with back pain and the feeling of pressure when you are nearing the end of the first stage of labour. Being in water during labour & birth can be a “cosy” experience giving you a sense of feeling safe. Finally, water can help the perineum stretch gently as the baby is being born, reducing the chance of injury.

Waterbirth has increased in popularity over the past 10 years. Even though we know there are huge benefits, in 2015, just 9% of babies in the UK were born in water.

In 2019, 91% of women in our care who birthed at home, chose to have their baby in a birthing pool. None of them needed any additional pain relief other than gas & air. How amazing is that!



Frequently Asked Questions

Can my baby drown?

This is very unlikely. Babies do not need to breathe when they are first born. In the womb they get their oxygen from the blood that comes from their mum through the placenta. When a baby is born into water, they behave as if they were still in the womb, and they continue to get oxygen via the umbilical cord until they take their first breath of air. It is at this point that their lungs open up.

Your baby is only at risk if their head is brought out of the water and then goes back under, there is a sudden change in temperature or the blood from the placenta is affected.

Where can I have a Water Birth?

You can have a water birth in your home or you can go to your local hospital or birth centre if they have facilities. At home we can supply you with a new inflatable pool.

What can I wear for my Water Birth

Many women choose to wear a bra or bikini top as a tee-shirt can be too heavy and annoying in the water. If you prefer to be more covered up, you can twist the tee-shirt up into the bra. Basically, you can wear whatever you feel comfortable in on the top half, but it is advisable to take off any bottoms as you approach the birth.

What other pain relief can I have?

The support and pressure that the water gives you is sometimes referred to as 'nature's epidural' so many women have no need for other pain relief. However, if you do feel that you need a little extra, Entonox also known as Gas & Air can be made available to you if pre-ordered.

Can I still have Optimal/delayed cord clamping if I birth in water?

Yes. There are just a few instances where this may not be possible - as there are with births on dry land, but generally birth in water does not prevent delayed cord clamping.

How do I birth my placenta in the pool?

Your midwife may ask you to get out of the pool to birth your placenta. This makes it easier to help you in the event of an emergency as some mums feel faint after giving birth. However, if you want to stay in the water you normally can do.

Can I have the injection to deliver the placenta whilst I'm in the pool?

Yes you can. This can be administered into your arm if you are unable to raise your thigh or bottom out of the water. It is advisable to get out of the pool within a few minutes of having the injection to deliver your placenta.

When might I need to get out of the pool?

- If you feel unwell or there are concerns about your well-being (changes to your temperature or blood pressure for example, or if you are bleeding)*
- If the midwife is concerned about the wellbeing of your baby. For example, if your midwife sees meconium (this is when the baby has a poo whilst still inside the uterus)*
- If you have consented to an examination to assess progress*
- If your labour slows down or contractions weaken your midwife may suggest you get out of the pool to mobilise*
- To deliver your placenta*

How much room does the pool at home take up and how can I fill it ?

The pool is about the size of an average dining room table. It comes with an air pump and a water pump. We arrange for the pool to be delivered to you around 34 weeks of pregnancy so you have time to practice with it. Your midwife will advice on where to put it, how to inflate it and how to fill it. Please consider possible water damage as we can not be responsible for this. We advise against using a pool that has been used by someone else previously due to infection risks.

Facts and Stats

Normal Vaginal Birth Water birth has higher rates of normal vaginal birth compared to on land birth. This is likely an effect of labouring in water at any time, since hydrotherapy also promotes normal vaginal birth even if mothers choose to get out of the pool before giving birth.

Episiotomy & tears Waterbirth is protective against episiotomy and tears. Fewer tears occur and when they do, they tend to be smaller.

Need for pain relief There is lots of research evidence to show that women who birth in water require less pain relief.

Total length of labour

Evidence is mixed but suggests that the first stage of labour and the second stage are a little shorter for labours in water.



If you would like the references to support any of the statements in this leaflet, please let us know.