

Patient Information

Using Water for Labour and Birth

Women may choose to labour and/or give birth in water, either in hospital or at home in a birthing pool. Many women report a greater sense of control and an increase in satisfaction when using water. Labouring in water may help you to cope better with labour and enhance levels of those hormones which influence the process of labour and birth. For many women it can be the key to a natural birth, as being immersed in water can help you to relax, rest between contractions and you are less likely to become tired. The buoyant effect of the water supports your body's weight and increases mobility, helping you to adopt the position of your choice.

Some documented benefits of using water are:

- [The feel good factor](#)
- [The freedom to move](#)
- [Physiological effects of water during labour and birth](#)
- [Staying in control of your birth](#)

Water helps women manage pain and can be easily combined with Entonox (gas and air), whilst in the birthing pool. If you choose other forms of pain relief such as opiates you will be advised to leave the pool.

Labour and birth in water is associated with low risks for both you and your baby when certain criteria are met

- You must be fit and well and have no known complications relating to your pregnancy or baby
- You should be at least 37 weeks and no more than 42 weeks pregnant
- If your membranes have ruptured this should have been no more than 24 hours before the onset of labour and the fluid must be clear
- You must be prepared to leave the pool if any complications of labour or birth arise

Many of the women who choose to have their baby's on the Midwifery-led Birthing Unit (MLBU) choose to use water for labour and/or birth. This is usually easy to arrange as there are 3 pools and 1 pool on Delivery Suite. Staff will try to accommodate your request to use the pool but, at busy times it will be dependent on availability. Please inform them when you ring before coming into hospital in labour. If you decide to have your baby at home, you can purchase or hire your own birthing pool. If you choose this option it is your responsibility to erect, fill and empty your own pool. If you have a pool at home you will also need to provide a waterproof thermometer and a sieve. Pre-filled

heated birthing pools, where the temperature is maintained by use of a heater and pump, are not recommended for labour or birth because of a possible association with Legionnaires disease.

Immersion in water before active labour has begun has been shown to slow the progress of labour. It is therefore better to avoid entering the pool until the labour is established. If you are wishing to use a pool at home it is advisable to wait until the midwife arrives before entering the pool so that she can assess if you are ready and that all is well with you and your baby. You can, however use the normal bath or shower to help you in early labour.

During the first stage of labour the water can be kept at a temperature which is comfortable for you but not greater than 37.5°. Both your temperature and the temperature of the water will be checked regularly. If you get too hot this may affect the baby's heart rate and you will be asked to leave the pool and cool down.

If you choose to stay in the water for the birth of the baby the water temperature needs to be maintained at 37- 37.5 °C. Your baby will be brought to the surface face uppermost following the birth.

If you have requested a natural third stage and if there are no complications, you can remain in the water until your placenta has delivered. Your baby should be kept close to your skin with its body submerged in the warm water until the third stage of labour is complete, providing all is well. If you choose to have the oxytocin injection to help the delivery of the placenta, you will need to leave the pool before this is given.

You will be asked to get out of the pool if the midwife is concerned about you or your baby's wellbeing or if labour is not progressing as expected.

In the hospital there is an evacuation process for dealing with rare but unforeseen emergency situations in the pool. In the homebirth situation you must be aware that in the event of an emergency it may not be so easy to evacuate you and as such careful consideration should be given to the positioning of the pool within your home.

If you have further questions, your midwife will be able advise you.

