

Waterbirth

Many women in labour find bathing in water very useful and in the UK more than 4000 women each year give birth in water.

The birthing pool at Liverpool Women's Hospital is larger than a normal bath and was provided in response to demand for this service by women. Women may use the pool during labour and delivery or just for labour only.

What are the benefits of using water for labour and birth?

- It may help you to relax
- You may feel more in control during labour
- You may need less pain killers in labour
- Your labour may be shorter
- It is easier to move around freely supported by the water

What are the risks of using water in labour and birth?

If the water temperature is kept at body temperature for delivery and if the baby's heart beat is satisfactory there is no known risk of complications during your labour and birth if you choose to give birth using water.

Before entering the pool there are certain conditions that have to be met

- The pool may only be used if there is a specially trained midwife available. If not, you will not be able to use the pool
- There must be no known problems in relation to your health or your pregnancy.
- You must be between 37 to 42 weeks pregnant.
- You must **not** have had a caesarean section at any time before.
- You must be in labour i.e. 4-5cm dilated (before this time you can use a normal bath to relax in). This is because entering the pool too early may encourage your labour to stop.
- It is important that you have not had any pain relief injections in the 4 hours before you get in the pool.

What happens when I am in the pool?

- Your midwife will check the temperature of the water in the pool every 15 minutes. This is to ensure that it is comfortable for you but more importantly that it is the correct temperature if the baby is born in the water
- You will be encouraged to have plenty of drinks to prevent you from becoming dehydrated in the warm room and water.
- You can wear whatever you feel comfortable in.
- All observations and vaginal examinations (internals) will be carried out as normal. These can be performed whilst you are in the water.

- The baby's heartbeat will be monitored every 15 minutes with the use of a specially designed waterproof monitor. This monitor displays the baby's heart beat but you will not be able to hear the heart beat yourself.
- If you need any further pain relief whilst in the pool, you will be able to have some gas & air (entonox).
- When you have reached the 2nd stage of labour and the baby is ready to be born, you may stay in the pool. The midwife will keep a check on how this stage is progressing by observing for signs of the baby's head becoming visible.
- As the baby's head is being delivered, the midwife will advise you about pushing and breathing techniques for delivery. The midwife will **not** have her hand on the baby's head to control the delivery, as this is not necessary in the water.
- When the baby's head is born there will be a period of about 1-minute before the body can be delivered. This is normal; the baby will not be breathing and will therefore not be harmed by being in the water. When the baby's body is delivered it is brought up to the surface of the water within 1 minute of birth.
- The afterbirth (Placenta) is delivered after the baby is born. This is the third stage of labour. You may choose to deliver this naturally in its own time (a passive 3rd stage) or following an injection (an active 3rd stage). Your placenta can be delivered naturally in the pool but if you wish to have an active 3rd stage you will need to leave the pool for this. For extra information about this there is another leaflet called '**First, second and third stages of labour**'
- If you need to have any stitches following the delivery your midwife may need to examine you internally out of the pool. The stitches may be done an hour later rather than straight away as this helps the tissue to recover from the effects of being in water for a long period of time.

Will I need to leave the birthing pool?

You may be asked to leave the pool if:

- You feel that you need stronger pain relief e.g. injection (Diamorphine / Pethidine) or an epidural. There is another leaflet called, 'Pain relief in labour'.
- There are unexpected problems in relation to:
 - Your labour slowing down (There is another leaflet called, 'What happens if my labour slows down').
 - The waters around the baby (amniotic fluid) may become meconium stained. This happens when the baby opens its bowels whilst in the womb. This may be a sign that the baby is distressed and therefore his/her heartbeat should be monitored continuously for the rest of the labour.
 - Concerns about the baby's heartbeat
 - Excessive bleeding
 - Any emergency situation

This information is not intended to replace discussion with either medical or midwifery staff. If you have any questions regarding the contents of this leaflet

please discuss this with a midwife by telephoning the Princess Diana Suite on **0151 702 4270 / 0151 702 4269, or ring 0151 708 9988** and ask switchboard to bleep the **'Midwifery Led Unit Bleep Holder'**.

Further information

For further information there is a list of useful web sites which can be found on the Liverpool Women's Hospital web site.

Go to

www.lwh.org.uk

Click on

Clinical Services

↓

Support & Information

↓

Useful organisations

If you require any advice about the information on the web sites please speak to a midwife or doctor at the hospital or a community midwife at the GP surgery.

This leaflet is available in other formats on request

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