

Water Birth

Waterbirth can allow a woman to give birth undisturbed and with dignity. It has advantages for both mother and baby. Women have been birthing in water as far back as Egyptian times and there are even petroglyphs depicting water birth of babies destined to become priests or priestesses.



Advantages for Mother

- You may feel more relaxed and better able to cope with your contractions
- Since the water provides a greater sense of privacy, it can reduce inhibitions, anxiety, and fears.
- The effect of buoyancy lessens your body weight, allowing free movement and new positioning.
- Buoyancy promotes more efficient uterine contractions and improved blood circulation resulting in better oxygenation of the uterine muscles, less pain for you, and more oxygen for your baby.
- The water seems to reduce stress-related hormones, allowing your body to produce endorphins which serve as pain-inhibitors.
- Your cervix may open up faster and help to shorten labor.
- Warm water is soothing, comforting, and relaxing.
- Water causes the perineum to become more elastic and relaxed, reducing the incidence and severity of tearing and the need for an episiotomy and stitches.

Benefits for the Baby

- Provides an environment similar to the amniotic sac.
- Eases the stress of birth, thus increasing reassurance and sense of security.

Safety of Water Birth

Water Birth is associated with:

- similar or lower rates of infection in mothers and babies
- less chance for transmission of GBS from GBS+ mothers
- similar or better results on tests that evaluate the baby's well being after birth ie. Apgar Scores
- similar or lower rates of babies admitted to special care units
- similar or lower rates of baby deaths

Will my baby try to breath underwater?

A number of factors inhibit babies from breathing underwater at the time of birth:

- Hormones- in the days before labor begins, breathing activity or “practice breathing” that baby does in utero decreases dramatically because of prostaglandins (hormones released by the placenta which also play a role in starting labor)
- Temperature- Newborns are sensitive to temperature. They are stimulated to breath by the cooler temperatures of air, compared to the warm environment inside the mother. When they are born into warm water, they aren't stimulated to breath in the warm water.
- Dive Reflex- Babies are born with a reflex that helps to prevent them from gasping for air when they are born underwater. They are in a water environment in utero and are born into a water environment. They will take their first breath as they are brought up above the water.
- Hypoxia- Babies are born experiencing acute hypoxia, meaning they are temporarily lacking oxygen which inhibits breathing.



Guidelines for Water Birth

- a healthy pregnancy
- 37 weeks gestation or later
- be in a warm bath
- ability to leave the water if your midwife has any concerns about you or your baby's well-being

Websites to find out more about Water Birth

- <https://waterbirth.org/>
- <https://evidencebasedbirth.com/waterbirth/>
- <https://www.mothersrisingbirth.com/2017/05/water-birth.html>
- <https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/labour-birth/where-can-i-give-birth/how-prepare-water-birth>