

Use of Water in Labour and Birth

August 2024

Why use water in labour and birth?

Immersing yourself in water is simple, effective, and readily available and has many potential benefits in labour and during the birth.

Throughout your pregnancy, you may already have found that being in water makes you feel more comfortable. Women often like to swim during pregnancy or spend time relaxing in the bath because it provides a sense of weightlessness. Water helps with aches and pains and may make you feel more relaxed.

The Royal Hospital for Women Birth Unit has several options for women to choose to labour and/or birth in the water. If you wish to use water immersion during your labour/birth please discuss with our staff.

Is water birth safe?

Yes, it is safe for healthy babies at term.

Until birth, your baby is surrounded by fluid. Your newborn baby has several protective mechanisms to stop them from inhaling water.

During pregnancy babies receive their oxygen through the placenta via the umbilical cord. Your baby does not breathe in the uterus, but they do practice breathing by moving their diaphragm in a regular and rhythmic pattern from as early as ten weeks.

Your baby's in-built response to labour and birth is to swallow rather than breathe. This is called a 'dive reflex'.

Benefits of water immersion in labour and birth

Water is a natural alternative to medicalised pain relief and many benefits have been documented.

Benefits include:

- Increased buoyancy helps you feel lighter, improves comfort and freedom to move
- Using water during your labour and/or birth means you are less likely to need epidural/medical pain relief
- A sense of being in a private space
- Supporting the release of your natural hormones, increasing relaxation
- Improving progress of labour and your ability to manage pain and/or discomfort
- Increasing options for birthing positions
- Water can relax pelvic floor muscles which may assist with the birth of your baby
- Many women describe the experience of water birth as positive and gentle
- Promotes immediate skin to skin with your baby which supports the establishment of breastfeeding and bonding



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Consumer Participation National Standards endorsed

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

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