

Choosing a Waterbirth

Women's and Children's Services



General Information

This leaflet is for all low risk women booked to deliver at East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust who are considering water for labour or labour and birth. Pools are available at the Lister Hospital Delivery Suite, and the QEII Delivery Suite (until Winter 2011). From Winter 2011, two pools will be available on the Midwife Led Unit at the Lister Hospital.

Who can use a water pool?

We advise that you should

- ◆ Be fit and healthy with no medical or pregnancy problems
- ◆ Be low risk so that you do not require continuous monitoring of your baby's heart rate
- ◆ Be at least 37 weeks pregnant
- ◆ Be expecting one baby
- ◆ Have a baby that is presenting head down
- ◆ Be in established labour – regular painful contractions with a cervical dilation of 4cms or more
- ◆ If your waters have broken the water should be clear – or very lightly meconium stained, with a normal baby heartrate (your midwife will confirm this)
- ◆ If you are being induced because you are overdue, but with no other pregnancy problems (eg. you have only needed one pessary or your waters broken artificially to get into established labour), you may still be suitable for labour/birth in water (discuss this with the midwife caring for you).

What is a birthing pool?

A birthing pool is a very large bath, deep enough to support a woman in labour and to enable her to change position easily and to safely give birth to her baby into warm water.

What are the possible benefits of using a pool?

The benefits, which you may achieve when using a birthing pool during labour and birth:

- ◆ The majority of women using a birthing pool find that the warm water encouraged and enabled them to relax more
- ◆ Relaxing and reducing stress allows a woman's body to release more of the hormone oxytocin which stimulates contractions and dilates the opening of the womb
- ◆ If a woman in labour becomes less stressed and more relaxed, she will increase the production of endorphins, which are her body's natural source of pain relief, and reduces the need for other forms of pain relieving drugs
- ◆ The buoyancy of the water allows a woman to change position more easily and therefore maintain a good flow of blood through the placenta to her baby
- ◆ Women who use a pool report higher levels of satisfaction and most would choose to use the pool again
- ◆ Your baby may experience a more gentle transition from the womb when delivered into warm water
- ◆ Water and warmth are natural pain relief

Research evidence is currently inconclusive regarding the relative risks and benefits of birth in water compared with other birth techniques.

How will the third stage of labour be managed?

Third stage of labour

You may choose to remain in the pool for a physiological third stage, which means the cord would remain attached to the baby until the placenta is delivered. In most cases women feel the natural urge to push and therefore deliver the placenta spontaneously in the water within 10 to 45 minutes after delivery. This enables skin to skin contact with your baby to take place in a warm and relaxing environment, whilst you and your baby get to know one another.

Alternatively, you may choose to have an active third stage, which involves cutting and clamping the cord shortly after the birth, draining the pool, and assisting you out to a dry area when an injection of Syntometrine would be given to enable the placenta to be delivered. Skin to skin contact with your baby can then take place.

Your midwife will discuss with you what is best for you and help you decide in labour how the third stage will be managed. If you appear to be losing more blood than is usual at this stage, the midwife will advise you to leave the pool to have the injection to contract your womb and reduce blood loss.

Frequently asked questions

Do I have to book a pool?

No. The pools are available on a first come first served basis and it is not possible to book ahead, unless you are having a water birth at home. You will need to let the midwives know that you would like to use the pool when your labour begins.

What can I wear?

You can wear whatever you like. Some women choose to wear a bikini top, a loose T-shirt or nothing at all.

How will my baby's heart beat be monitored?

It is possible to listen to your baby's heartbeat under the water. This will be done every 15 minutes with a portable listening device during the first stage of labour, and after each contraction or every five minutes during the second stage of labour. This is the usual method of monitoring a baby's heart beat during labour.

Will my baby breathe under water?

Your baby will be born into warm water which is very similar to their environment during pregnancy. They will breathe once they have been lifted out of the water and can feel cold air on their face.

Can I eat and drink?

Midwives will encourage you to eat and drink throughout your labour. We will supply you with water, tea and toast. You will probably want to bring in some food or Isotonic sports drinks to give you energy.

What other types of pain relief can I use?

You can use gas and air in the pool. If you need other types of pain relief you will have to leave the pool.

Can Dads get in too?

In theory yes! However, this limits the amount of space you have to move around in, and labouring women like to have room to move freely!

If Dads do decide to get in please wear appropriate clothing!

Will my skin wrinkle?

No. The water is kept at body temperature (about 36-37 degrees) and the skin does not wrinkle.

How long can I stay in the pool?

If you are making progress in your labour, there are no time limits placed upon you. If your labour is too slow or there are concerns about your health or the baby's well being you will be advised to leave the pool.

Can I use the pool if I am being induced because my baby is overdue?

It is possible that you may be able to use water if you are induced because your baby is overdue; it depends on what method the doctors and midwives have used to start your labour. If you need a hormone drip to start your labour a water birth would not be recommended because your baby's heart beat would need to be monitored continuously throughout labour. However, if you go into labour by having a vaginal pessary or by having your waters broken it may be possible to use water. You will need to discuss this with the midwife looking after you because each situation is different.

Can I use the pool if I have Group B Strep or my waters have broken for a long while?

Women known to be colonised with Group B Streptococcus in current pregnancy or with prolonged rupture of membranes, may still use the pool for labour and birth but it is recommended that intravenous antibiotics are administered during labour to reduce the risk of infection to baby. These antibiotics will be given

intravenously once labour has established via a small plastic needle (cannula) in the back of your hand. Once run through, the antibiotics will be disconnected but the cannula will remain in-situ and a protective dressing applied to enable you to use the pool. The antibiotics may need to be repeated if the birth has not taken place within the next 4 hours; you will be asked to leave the pool temporarily for this.

Will I need stitches (suturing) if I have my baby in water?

There is no evidence to say that the risk of perineal trauma is any more or less in water. Water birth does, however, reduce the risk of episiotomy (a cut performed to make the vaginal opening bigger).

When can I use the birthing pool?

The best time for a woman to enter the pool during labour is when her cervix has reached at least 4cms dilation. However, you may use the pool before this but may need to leave the pool if labour slows down. We will, therefore, encourage you to stay mobile during the early stages of labour until you are properly established in labour and ready to enter the pool.

Do I have to give birth in the pool?

No, the midwife will support you in whatever you decide to do. You may use the pool just for labour or for labour and birth. The midwife will assist you out of the pool whenever you wish to leave. You may be asked to leave the pool if the midwife has any concerns regarding your labour or birth.

Further Information:

www.infochoice.org

Contact Numbers:

Lister Hospital

Antenatal Clinic	01438 314333 ext. 4070
Delivery Suite	01438 781124 (24 hours)

QEII Hospital

Antenatal Clinic	01707 328111 ext.4600
Delivery Suite	01707 390983 (24 hours)

**You and your baby are important to us –
thank you for choosing East and North Herts NHS Trust**

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

Date of publication: June 2011

Author: K Gladwell

Reviewed by L Gorski-Giles Lay Rep. from MSLC

Reference: WB Version: 1b

Review Date: June 2013

You can request this
information in a
different format or
another language.