



The National Maternity Hospital



Birthing Pool for labour and birth Information Booklet





Introduction

This booklet aims to provide women and their birth partners with information on the use of water during labour and for birth.

The Labour and Birthing Unit at The National Maternity Hospital has one large deep pool. This pool can be used for labour only or for your labour and the birth of your baby.





What are the benefits of using a pool during labour?

- ✓ The water in a birthing pool supports 75% of a labouring woman's bodyweight, allowing a feeling of buoyancy and enabling ease of movement
- ✓ Less painful contractions/surges due to the warm deep water
- ✓ A feeling of calmness and control
- ✓ Less likely to need stronger pain relief
- ✓ The relaxing effect of warm water helps produce endorphins, promoting the body's natural pain relief mechanism
- ✓ Less likelihood of needing drugs such as oxytocin to speed up labour

Who can use the pool during labour and for birth?

Healthy women with no underlying medical conditions who:

- Have a singleton pregnancy
- Are over 37 weeks and less than 42 weeks
- Have a baby that is presenting head first
- Demonstrate good mobility and able to physically get in and out of the pool
- Have a BMI of 35 or less at booking
- Have a healthy full blood count - greater than 10.0g/dl
- Spontaneously start labour
- Have intact waters
- If waters have broken, they must be broken less than 24 hours
- Are progressing normally in labour with baby's heart rate within normal limits
- In active labour with strong, regular contractions/surges





What are the reasons you may be asked to leave the pool during labour or birth?

- To use the toilet
- If there is a concern about baby's heart rate or a difficulty in hearing the heart rate
- If there is meconium seen when your waters break
- For a vaginal examination
- If your labour is not progressing/your contractions/surges slow down
- If you get too hot/warm or develop a temperature, raised pulse or blood pressure
- If you request additional pain relief
- If the water becomes contaminated
- If the correct water temperature cannot be maintained
- If your midwife has any concerns during the second stage of labour – birthing your baby
- If you feel faint
- Contractions/surges easing off
- For the third stage of labour (birthing your placenta)

Your midwife will discuss any concerns with you and your birth partner and keep you fully informed so that you understand the reasons why you may need to leave the pool



Are there any risks to labouring or birthing in water?

Up to date evidence on water births show that there is no increased risk to you or your baby if you labour and birth in water compared to 'dry' land. (Pool Study, UK 2023)

For healthy women with an uncomplicated term pregnancy, the evidence shows complications appear to be rare.

In rare cases, the umbilical cord may unintentionally separate between the newborn and the placenta after birth. During a water birth, there may be a strong instinct to bring the baby above the level of the water immediately after birth. However, doing so could cause the umbilical cord to snap. To prevent the cord from snapping during a water birth, midwives and healthcare providers will gently guide the baby to the surface without sudden movements.



Can you book the pool in The National Maternity Hospital?

It is not possible to book the pool in advance since you do not know when your labour will start. If the pool is not available your midwife will offer you other water therapy support such as a shower and other non-pharmacological methods of support until the pool is available.

Unfortunately, on very rare occasions the pool may not become available.



How can your birth partner help?

The role of the birth partner is to support their partner in labour, physically and mentally helping her to feel relaxed and cared for.

They can help by:

- Assisting you to change position
- Reminding you about breathing techniques
- Supporting you through contractions/surges
- Keeping the room calm and having a relaxed atmosphere
- Offering drinks frequently (isotonic drinks are useful as the room can get quite warm)
- Using a facecloth rinsed in cool water to keep you cool





What do you wear in the pool?

The choice is yours. Women are often comfortable being naked, while others wear light clothing or a bikini top.

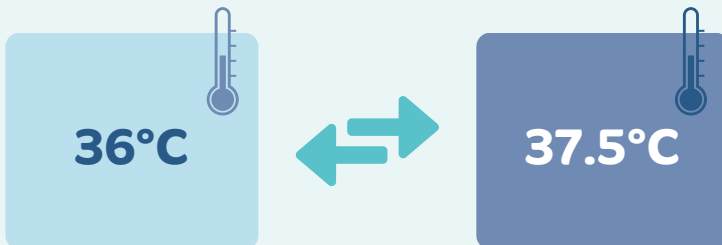
You should bring:

- 1 large bath towel
- 1 towelling dressing gown for when you leave the pool

How warm is the water?

The water temperature is between 36 - 37°C during labour. For your baby's birth, the water needs to be as close to 37°C as possible and not exceed 37.5°C.

The midwife will monitor and record the water temperature at regular intervals during your labour.





What other methods of support can I use while in the pool?

- You may like to consider practising the activities in the Labour Hopscotch Framework while you are in the water. This includes: all fours positions, squatting, lunging, massage, counter pressure, hypnobirthing visualisation, looking at your mood boards or listening to relaxing music or a personal playlist.
- Entonox (Gas and Air) can also be used while in the water.
- If you request a stronger pharmacological method of pain relief your midwife will advise you to leave the pool.

How will your baby's heart rate be monitored?

The midwife will use a waterproof handheld battery operated monitor to listen to your baby's heart rate. This is done every 15 minutes in the first stage of labour (dilation of your cervix to 10cm) and every 5 minutes in the second stage of labour (the pushing stage).





Can I labour but not give birth in the pool?

Yes, some women prefer to use the pool for pain relief during labour and then leave the pool for the birth of their baby.

Although most women enjoy using the pool, being in the water does not suit everybody. You can change your mind about using the pool at any time and get out of the water.

Will my baby try to breathe while under the water?

A concern for some people is that the baby will breathe while still under the water. There are many mechanisms that prevent this, one of which is the change in temperature/environment that normally occurs when a baby is born. The water temperature in the pool is carefully monitored throughout labour and birth so that it mimics the temperature inside your womb.

Ensuring the baby's head is totally submerged in the warm water during the birth prevents the breathing reflex from starting until the head is clear of the water.





Can I still use the pool if my waters have broken?

Yes, if the fluid around your baby remains clear (your baby's bowels have not opened – i.e. passed meconium), your waters have not broken for more than 24 hours and you and your baby are well.

How is the placenta (afterbirth) birthed?

Your midwives will assist you out of the pool to birth your placenta. This enables them to observe the amount of blood you may be losing. Evidence supports the use of an oxytocic injection to control bleeding, so we can administer this for you before you get out of the water with your consent.

If you choose not to have this medication you will still need to leave the pool to birth your placenta so the midwife can monitor your blood loss.





Who do I speak to if I would like a water birth?

Speak with your healthcare provider at your antenatal appointments and they will document in your chart your preferred birth wishes.

We recommend that you attend The National Maternity Hospital's antenatal education classes, or The Domino and Homebirth Service antenatal classes if you are with The Domino Midwifery Team. The classes will help you and your partner prepare for your birth. Classes will also give you the opportunity to visit the Labour and Birthing Unit and see the birthing pool.





Can I have my baby in water if I am having a home birth?

Yes, The Domino and Homebirth Service Team are currently being trained to facilitate water birth if you are having a home birth.

The Domino Midwifery Team will advise you on how to source a suitable pool for your birth.

Please discuss with your midwife where you wish to place the pool and consider the following:

- Location of electrical sockets and equipment
- Whether the floor can bear the load of a full pool
- Providing adequate space around the pool
- Providing covering for the floor

Please do not enter the pool until your midwife has arrived and has checked that you and your baby are well



The National Maternity Hospital

Resources

The Pool Study -
Cardiff, UK 2023



For more info
& to book your class



Contact information



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