

Fact Sheet

Waterbirth.

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“The water provided me a birth environment that embraced intimacy, safety, mobility, and confidence”. Justine C

Imagine delving into a warm deep bath to soothe your muscles and allow your body to feel weightless and relaxed. When your baby is due to be born you may like to consider the advantages of using water during your labour and/or birth.



Water provides a natural and safe alternative which can help your labour progress and provide your body with rest. You may choose to utilise the baths within Westmead Birth Unit during your labour and birth and if this is a suitable option for you, midwives will support your choice.

Waterbirth is an option for many women who are

- aiming for an active labour
- wanting a birth without the use of medical interventions



Benefits of waterbirth

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

- women using water during their labour and/or birth are less likely to use epidural/spinal analgesia
- maternal relaxation is increased and allows the positive hormones of labour to freely circulate and help prepare babies for birth.
- water allows freedom of movement and many birthing positions are possible within the bath
- remaining active in labour promotes blood flow to your placenta and baby
- water can relax and soften pelvic floor muscles which may assist the birth of your baby
- many women describe the experience of waterbirth as positive and gentle
- skin to skin contact with babies is initiated easily within the bath. This promotes the establishment of breastfeeding and allows your baby to remain warm
- early skin to skin contact reduces newborn stress and stress hormone levels
- you may choose to delay clamping of the cord and allow the cord to continue to pulsate for an extended period. Delayed cord clamping results in your baby receiving a more complete blood volume.

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Your baby's first breath

During pregnancy your baby is surrounded by amniotic fluid. This fluid assists your baby's growth, development and movement. While babies practice breathing movements during pregnancy, your baby receives oxygen through the placenta and umbilical cord.

Your baby is protected from breathing throughout labour by the hormones that your body produces. Additionally, your baby has other important ways to ensure breathing does not commence prior to birth.

Understanding these mechanisms can help you understand the safety of waterbirth.

- during pregnancy your baby's circulation is different to neonatal circulation (after birth). At birth fetal circulation switches to newborn circulation when the foremen ovale (valve in the heart) and the ductus arteriosus closes
- another important trigger for breathing is achieved through stimulation of your babies face achieved when your baby is brought to the surface of the water
- this stimulates the trigeminal nerve (the fifth cranial nerve) around the nose and mouth of your baby and a message is received for your baby to commence breathing
- other mechanisms include a response or reflex by your baby which causes them to swallow rather than breathe.

This is known as a 'dive reflex'. This reflex is present up to around six months of age and assists with breastfeeding.



Who can choose a waterbirth

You may choose to discuss waterbirth with your midwife or doctor during pregnancy. Women that choose water immersion in labour and/or birth include:

- women who are healthy and have an uncomplicated single pregnancy at term (37-42 weeks gestation)
- women who have a cephalic presentation (baby's head is down)
- women with a midwife or labour partner present at all times
- women who are capable of getting in and out of the bath with minimal assistance and weigh less than 100kg
- women who have a clear understanding they may be asked to leave the bath for further care.



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“A baby is the beginning of wonder, hope and dreams of possibilities. Start preparing for your baby’s birth today.” – Suzie H

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:
WSLHD-Get_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au

