



Mercy Health
Care first

Your important health information

Water birth at Mercy Hospital for Women

We offer the use of water immersion during labour and birth to women with low risk of complications. The following information should help you and your care team make an informed choice about the birth of your baby.

Why water immersion?

Water immersion in a bath or a pool during labour may have the following benefits:

- increased comfort and mobility
- a deeper sense of relaxation
- decreased need for pain relieving drugs
- help bonding between mother and baby
- greater maternal satisfaction and positive birth experience

Who can use water immersion during labour and birth?

You and your baby must fit all of the following criteria to be able to use water for labour and/or birth:

Suitability for use of water immersion during labour and/or birth

- be healthy, with no medical complications in pregnancy
- be pregnant with only one baby and their position is head down
- be at least 37 weeks pregnant, and no more than 41 weeks
- your waters (once broken) are clear and remain clear
- your temperature and other observations are normal during labour
- there is no increased risk of infection for you, your baby, or your carers
- continuous monitoring of your baby's heartbeat is not required throughout the labour
- your baby's heart rate must remain within the normal range
- your body mass index is no higher than 35 at birth, and you can get in and out of the bath easily
- you do not require an interpreter
- you had no prior complications with previous births (discuss with your midwife/doctor)
- you have not had a previous caesarean section
- you give written consent on our 'water birth consent form'

You and your doctor/midwife will have a discussion when you come into the hospital in labour to confirm that water immersion is still a safe option for you and your baby.

The most suitable time for you to enter the bath/pool is usually when your labour contractions have become strong and regular.

Common concerns about using water for labour and birth?

You and your baby might get too hot

If your body overheats, your baby may also get too hot. This may cause the baby's heart rate to rise. The baby's heart rate will be monitored during your labour. If it rises above the normal range, you will need to leave the water.

It is also important to keep drinking water. If your temperature rises while you are in the water, you will be asked to leave the water.

You or your baby may develop an infection.

Infection can be very serious in newborns. Some babies get very sick and need nursery admission and intravenous antibiotics in the first few days of life. We will keep the water clean during labour. You and your baby will be monitored while in the water and after birth to ensure you both remain well. If there are concerns about the risk of infection, we will ask you to leave the bath.

Your baby may inhale water

If you choose to birth while in water, your baby should be born under the water, and then *immediately* lifted out into the air. Your midwife will help lift your baby. Your baby's head must then be kept above the water so that breathing can start and the baby doesn't inhale water.

Your baby's umbilical cord may break

There is a small increased risk (0.8 in every 100 births) that the cord may snap when birthing in water. This may result in your baby losing blood until the cord can be clamped. If this does not happen quickly, the blood loss may become significant. Those affected babies will need admission to the neonatal intensive care unit, a blood transfusion and potentially further intensive care management.

Are there any special requirements whilst I am in the water for labour and/or birth?

Labour in water

- You must have another adult with you at all times while in the birthing bath/pool
- The bath/pool must be filled with fresh clean water only (no additives such as soap, oils, salts, etc.)
- You can use nitrous gas for pain relief while in the water, but no pethidine, morphine or an epidural
- You must leave the water if the midwife or doctor is concerned about the wellbeing and safety of you or your baby

Birth in water

- All the requirements for using water during labour must continue to be met (see above)
- Your baby must be gently brought to the surface as they are born, and the head must then remain above the water
- The baby must be removed from the water immediately if they need help to breathe
- You must leave the water soon after the birth and for the birth of the placenta

If you have any further questions or require additional information, please discuss the use of water during labour and/or birth with your midwife or doctor.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

Mercy Hospital for Women

Birthing services

Phone: 03 8458 4058

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