

Using Water for Labor and Birth



How is warm water used during labor and birth?

A bath or shower can help you relax and feel less pain during labor. Some women choose to give birth in water.

Will it be safe for me to be in water during my labor and/or birth?

It is safe for you to be in water during labor if you have had no problems with your pregnancy and you do not have any complications during labor. Talk to your health care provider about reasons that using water during labor or birth may not be right for you.

What are the benefits of being in water during labor?

The first stage of labor starts when you have regular contractions and lasts until you start pushing. During the first stage of labor, being in water can:

- Help you relax between contractions; even the sight and sound of water can be calming
- Help you cope with your contractions so they do not feel as painful
- Help you experience less fear and stress
- Lower your chance of needing pain medications
- Make it easier to move and change positions
- Shorten your labor

What are the risks of being in water during labor?

There are no known risks to you or to your baby if you use water to help you relax during your labor. Research shows no higher chance of infection for women or babies after labor or birth in water compared to women who do not use water during labor or birth. The tubs are cleaned well before and after each birth.

How do I use the tub during labor?

If you and your baby are doing fine, you may use the tub any time that you want and for as long as you want. Water will provide the most comfort and benefit if it completely covers your body and stomach up to your breasts.

Being in water during active labor can help your labor progress faster. When women are in water during early labor, sometimes contractions can slow down or stop for a while. Your providers will monitor the baby's heart rate while you are in the tub. It can take some time to fill the tub with water and make sure the temperature is correct. If you are having your baby in a hospital or birth center, check before you go into labor to see if it has tubs and let the staff know that you want to use the tub when you arrive.

What are the benefits of giving birth in water?

- Some women feel that giving birth in water is an easier birth for the mother and a more gentle welcome for the baby.
- There is a lower chance of having an episiotomy (cut at the opening of the vagina) if you have a waterbirth.

What are the risks of giving birth in water?

If you give birth in water, there are a few problems that can occur, but they are not common:

- You and your baby can get too hot, which can cause changes in the baby's heart rate. To keep this from happening, water temperatures should be kept comfortable (95°F–99°F) and never exceed 100°F.



- Your baby could breathe water into the lungs at the time of birth. This does not happen very often. To prevent your baby from breathing in water, your baby should be brought up and out of the water as quickly as possible after birth. You will need to be careful to make sure your baby does not go back under the water after taking a breath. There have been a few reports of a baby drowning from not being brought out of the water quickly enough.
- If the umbilical cord is short and the baby is brought out of the water too quickly, the umbilical cord can tear. If this happens, there is a chance that the baby could need a blood transfusion. To keep this from happening, your health care provider should check the umbilical cord length and bring the baby gently out of the water right after birth.

How will my baby and I be taken care of if I give birth in water?

If you are interested in having a waterbirth, check to see if this is offered where you plan to have your baby. Some providers and settings do not have the equipment or experience to offer a waterbirth. If waterbirth is available and you choose this form of birth:

- Your provider will discuss the benefits and risks associated with waterbirth. You may need to sign a consent form saying that you understand the risks and choose to have a waterbirth. This form will probably say that you agree to get out of the water at any time if asked to by your provider. This is important in order to keep you and your baby safe.
- Once you enter the tub, your vital signs (temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing) will be checked regularly. The baby's heart rate will be also be checked frequently, usually every 15 to 30 minutes until you start pushing, and then every 5 to 15 minutes while you are pushing.
- During waterbirth the baby should be born completely underwater and brought out of the water to take a first breath. If you and the baby are healthy, the two of you may stay in the tub after the birth as long as both of your heads remain above water. The placenta can be safely delivered in the tub or you may move to a bed to deliver the placenta, depending on your choice and the choice of your provider.

Please write down any questions that you may have about labor or birth in water and ask your provider about this option during a prenatal visit.

For More Information

National Childbirth Trust

Frequently asked questions about labor and birth in water
<http://www.nct.org.uk/birth/use-water-birth-pools-labour>

Waterbirth International

Frequently asked questions about waterbirth
<http://www.waterbirth.org/waterbirth-faq>

Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond

Setting up and choosing a birth pool
<http://www.pregnancy.com.au/birth-choices/waterbirth/waterbirth-articles/how-to-set-up-a-birth-pool.shtml>

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