Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

**Freephone (City Hospital Campus):** 0800 052 1195
**Freephone (QMC Campus):** 0800 183 0204
**From a mobile or abroad:** 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301
**E-mail:** pals@nuh.nhs.uk
**Letter:** NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

[www.nuh.nhs.uk](http://www.nuh.nhs.uk)

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The use of water for labour and birth

A guide for parents to be

Maternity Department

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patientinformation@nuh.nhs.uk or phone 0115 924 9924 ext. 67754.

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.
This leaflet is designed to provide women and their partners with information about using water during labour and birth.

We all know how good it feels to have a long hot bath, so just imagine how therapeutic warm water can be during labour. Many women testify that the warm sensations on their skin remind them how powerful and sensual a body in labour should be. The warmth of the water can help to reduce muscle spasm and tension and many women say the water and pool acts a privacy curtain.

Benefits of labouring in water?

- You are more likely to have a natural normal labour and birth
- It may shorten the length of your labour
- Less likely to need drugs to speed up your labour
- A more comfortable labour in an unrestricted environment
- Less painful contractions and less need for medical pain relief
- A feeling of being more in control of your body
- Water helps to relax and soften your perineum (the skin between the vagina and anus) therefore reducing the risk of tearing.
- 75% of your weight is supported by the water, so it is easier and more comfortable to move around
- A gentle and calm birth for you and your baby
- A relaxed warm baby guided straight into the arms of its mother
- A more enjoyable and satisfying labour
Further information

The information in this leaflet is gained from guidelines which midwives and doctors use all the time. They are from local and national guidelines, and are produced from research. Your midwife or doctor can give you more information should you require it.

You can get further information from:

- www.nuh.nhs.uk
- www.nice.org.uk
- Positive ways to manage your Labour NUH leaflet
Labour

Who can use the pool?

Generally, if you and your baby are healthy and between 37 and 42 weeks pregnant, and you haven't had any serious medical conditions or complications during this, and any previous, pregnancy you should be able to use the pool.

Unfortunately it is only possible to use the pool if you are pregnant with one baby, and your baby is lying with its head down (cephalic presentation).

You should be physically able to get in and out of the pool, and have a pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index (BMI) of 35 or less.

Your iron count needs to be at a good level, 100gL or more, so eat plenty of red meats and green vegetables.

The majority of women can still use the pool even if a small intervention is needed. For example your labour is being induced because you are over due, your waters have already broken, and you need antibiotics for group B strep.

If you are unsure as to whether you are eligible to use the pool please speak to your midwife or a supervisor of midwives.

Do I need to book the pool?

As you do not know exactly when your labour will start it would be impossible to book the pool in advance. However, we will do our best to accommodate your wishes. Inform the midwife about your wishes to use the pool when you phone the labour ward to let us know you are coming in.

If you are giving birth to your baby at home you can hire or buy an inflatable pool for your personal use, but unfortunately we don’t have the facilities for you to bring these in to hospital with you.

Water birth workshops

A 90 min workshop is run at both the QMC and the City campus and will give you and your partner all the information you need about labouring and giving birth in water.

The workshop will take place in a parent education room and if the pool rooms are not being used we will also go to labour ward. The session will be of most benefit to you if you attend when you are around 34 weeks pregnant. The session is led by an experienced midwife and is done in small groups of 8 or 9 women with their birthing partners.

Because of the size limitations of the birthing pool room we ask that you only bring one birthing partner with you.

City Hospital campus: The workshop is held on the first Wednesday of every month 6-7.30pm.

QMC campus: The workshop is held on the fourth Wednesday of every month 6-7.30pm

Booking your workshop
Telephone: 0115 9691169 ext. 55178
Email: parenteducation@nuh.nhs.uk
Is giving birth in water different to ‘dry’ land?
You and your baby are looked after exactly the same.
Regardless of your choice of birth we aim to make your labour and birth a momentous, and fulfilling experience.

Are there any risks?
Research evidence shows that there is no increased risk to you or your baby if you labour and birth in water compared to ‘dry’ land.

How is the placenta (afterbirth) delivered?
If you have had a normal labour and birth you can stay in the water to birth your placenta without the assistance of drugs. If you would prefer you can have an oxytocic drug via an injection to help your placenta to come out, but you need to get out of the pool after your baby is born for this. It is your choice and as long as you understand your options you can decide at the time.

How can the birth partner help?
Your main role is to support your labouring partner; physically and mentally helping her to feel relaxed and cared for. Keep the room calm, encouraging her to stay in control and to keep her breathing steady. Massaging shoulders and arms will help her to stay relaxed. You could help by assisting her to change position offering her drinks frequently and use a facecloth rinsed in cold water to keep her cool. You can get into the pool if you wish, but don’t forget your swim wear!

What if the pool is already in use?
There are three pools at each campus. At QMC there is one in the consultant led department, and two on the midwifery led care department. At City campus there are two labour rooms with pools and one bathroom with a pool size bath. Therefore it would be very unusual for them all to be in use when you arrive. If this does happen we will support you to stay relaxed and mobile and use other facilities such as a shower or the active birth equipment until a pool is available.

What do I wear in the pool?
This is entirely personal and your choice. Some women enter the pool naked, some wear pants and a bra, others wear a t-shirt. Many women say the water makes them feel secure and even when wearing minimal clothing they feel more private. A dressing gown is useful for when you leave the pool.

How warm is the water?
The water temperature during your labour is set to your comfort, usually between 35-37°C, this can be altered easily. For your baby’s birth, the midwife will regulate the water temperature to around 37°C. You need to drink plenty of fluids whilst in the pool to stop you from getting dehydrated. Non-fizzy isotonic (sport) drinks are good.

At what point do I enter the pool?
You can benefit from water at any stage of your labour. However, there is some evidence to show that labour may slow down if you get in to the pool too early before your contractions are regular.

If you are having your baby at home and you are using a birthing pool, wait until your midwife arrives before you get in.
Can I put anything in the water?

The benefits of aromatherapy oils can be utilised whilst in the pool. Some oils can be added to the water but you might find it more beneficial if you inhale the aroma via a handkerchief, taper or an aroma stone. This way you can change the oils accordingly to your need, rather than changing the water from the pool.

What if I need additional pain relief?

Water submersion during labour and birth works in many ways to reduce the discomfort of your contractions. It increases the production of the hormone endorphin which is your body's natural pain killer. Water helps your body to relax so there is less tension in your body. The buoyancy of the water allows you to adopt different positions easily, allowing you to be more comfortable.

Breathing and relaxation techniques, massage and music are all very good coping strategies, but are often overlooked. Entonox (gas and air) is also available for you to use in the pool, and this works very well alongside the water.

You can not use opiate pain relief, such as diamorphine or pethidine whilst you are in the pool as these drugs can cause drowsiness. If pethidine or diamorphine are/have been used you will need to wait approximately 2 hours before using the pool.

How is my baby’s heart rate going to be monitored?

We have a waterproof hand held ultrasonic heart rate monitor, which can be safely used while you are in the water. It will be used intermittently during your labour to assess the well-being of your baby.

Birth

Can I give birth to my baby in the water?

Yes you can. You can get in and out of the pool as you please. You may choose to stay in the pool for pain relief in the first stage of labour and remain in the water for the birth, or you may prefer to leave the pool for the birth of your baby. It is your choice and you can decide your preference at the time.

Would I ever be asked to leave the pool?

We would only ever ask you to leave the water if we were concerned about the condition of either you or your baby and we needed to monitor either of you more closely. For example; If your waters break and your baby has had its bowels open (passed meconium).

Your midwife will discuss her concerns with you, and you will be kept fully informed so you understand the reasons why.

Once either yours or your baby's condition has been examined more closely you may be able to get back in to the water.

Will my baby breathe while it is under the water?

This is a very common question. No, babies only breathe when they sense a change in the environment from the water into the air. A complex chain of chemical, hormonal and physical responses initiates the baby's first breath, so it doesn't occur under water.

The water temperature is monitored carefully during the birth to make sure the environment is right. We also make sure that the baby's head is totally submerged during the birth so the breathing reflex is not triggered too early.