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## Women & Children's Unit

# Water Birth

## WATERBIRTH

We are pleased to tell you that Stirling Royal Infirmary can now offer you the opportunity to use a birthing pool for your labour and birth. We will have one pool in our labour ward; unfortunately this may not always be available for you if it is already being used.

We would like to help as many women as possible to have a straight forward birth. We know that the more relaxed, secure and in control you feel and the more able you are to move about freely the more likely it is that you will have a quicker and more straightforward birth. For some women birthing pools offer all these benefits.

Please talk to your team midwife if you are interested in using water for your labour and/or birth. She will give you more information and answer any further questions you may have.

We have compiled this information leaflet to give you and your partner some information about labour and birth in water.

## LABOURING IN WATER

There are many benefits in using water for your labour. This includes: less painful contractions, less likely that you will need a pain relieving injection, such as diamorphine, or an epidural, a shorter labour and less need for drugs (oxytocin) to help make your contractions more effective (RCOG/RCM 2006).

## BIRTH IN WATER

Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence from research trials to tell us all we want to know about birth in water (RCOG/RCM 2006). However, there is a rare - but a real risk - for babies born under water including: the risk of drowning, the cord rupturing (splitting apart) and infection.

## IS A WATERBIRTH SUITABLE FOR ME?

Generally, if you are healthy, between 37 and 42 weeks pregnant, have an uncomplicated pregnancy and have no serious medical illnesses or complications and, if applicable, your previous labours have been completely normal. (We do not encourage women with open skin lesions as the risk of infection from the pool environment increases).

Stirling Royal Infirmary Maternity Unit has evidence-based guidelines in place which clarify when it may not be safe for women to use the pool. Your team midwife will advise you.

## SAFETY

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WATER TEMPERATURE** - We recommend that you regulate the water temperature so you are comfortable. This should be between 35°C-37°C in first stage of labour and at 37°C for the birth of your baby. The midwife will check your temperature, the water and the room temperature every hour.

*We encourage you to drink extra water to prevent dehydration.*

## WHEN SHOULD I GO INTO THE WATER?

There is not enough evidence about when is the best time to enter the pool. However, we believe that the best time is when your labour is established.

## PAIN RELIEF

If you require gas and air (Equanox) this can be used in the pool. However, if you need a pain relieving injection or an epidural you will need to leave the pool. If you have previously had a pain relieving injection four hours should lapse before getting into the pool.

## THE BIRTH

As the birth approaches, you will know whether you wish to birth in the pool; some women prefer to birth their baby out of the water. Your baby will be allowed to birth with no-one touching and you will be supported with verbal guidance from your midwife to help ensure your baby is not stimulated to breathe before reaching the surface. The midwife will raise your baby gently to the surface, head first. Your baby will then start to breathe, so its head must not go back into the water. You may notice that your baby is a blue colour, has its eyes open and is very calm.

## THE THIRD STAGE (PLACENTA)

More research is needed about the risks and benefits of having the third stage of labour under water (RCOG/RCM 2006). We will ask you to leave the pool to deliver your placenta. If your birth is straightforward you may choose not to have the syntometrine injection (which helps your placenta deliver). Please ask your midwife for more information.

## REASONS FOR LEAVING THE POOL

You will be asked to leave the pool for the following reasons:

- To use the toilet
- For internal vaginal examinations to assess progress in labour
- If there is any difficulty hearing the baby's heart rate or any irregularity in the baby's heart rate
- If your blood pressure, temperature or pulse rate becomes abnormal
- If your midwife is concerned about you or your baby's condition
- Extra pain relief (injections or epidural)
- If the labour is not progressing as expected
- For delivery of the placenta (afterbirth)

You may choose to get out of the pool at any point in your labour. If your midwife has any concerns about either you or your baby you will be informed of the reason and asked to leave the pool immediately.

## HOW WILL MIDWIVES CARE FOR ME DURING LABOUR AND BIRTH IN WATER?

We will try and create a calm, unhurried, relaxed environment, encourage you as necessary and disturb you as little as possible. We will listen to your baby's heart beat; check your temperature, pulse and blood pressure regularly.

## WHAT SHOULD I WEAR?

Wear whatever you feel comfortable in. Some women like being naked when they give birth because it gives you freedom to move around without clothing getting in the way, and you can have skin to skin contact with your baby. Others feel more comfortable in the pool with a cropped top or t-shirt. It is important that you feel relaxed and in control, so what you wear is entirely up to you.

You may find it useful to bring a towelling dressing gown to keep you warm when you get out of the pool e.g. for the toilet.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO USE WATER FOR MY LABOUR AND OR BIRTH?

If you are interested please discuss this with your team midwife at your next antenatal clinic appointment so she can document your wishes.

REFERENCE - Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists/Royal College of Midwives (2006) Joint Statement Immersion in Water During Labour and Birth.