

WATER IMMERSION FOR LABOUR & BIRTH



If you have any English language difficulties, please ask staff to book an interpreter.

From home contact the Telephone Interpreter Service on 13 1450.

Services are provided free of charge. Ask staff if this information is available in your preferred language.

EASTERN HEALTH MATERNITY SERVICE

Information for pregnant women

Eastern Health Maternity believes that pregnancy and childbirth are normal life events and unnecessary intervention should be avoided. Decisions in maternity care should be based upon the most current evidence, in conjunction with the choices of the women in our care.

Many women use water in labour as an option for comfort, mobility and privacy in labour. The use of water in labour is safe for healthy women with uncomplicated pregnancy and has been shown reduce the need for other methods of pain relief, including epidural. Buoyancy and freedom of movement can aid relaxation and relieve anxiety and this in turn can promote more effective contractions -if the water is entered once labour is well established.

Some women also wish to give birth in the bath – known as ‘water birth’. Enthusiasts of water birth argue that water can help the woman to ‘let go’ and focus inwards as labour progresses. This can aid the birth process because women are more relaxed, promoting natural painkillers called ‘endorphins’ and reducing the production of hormones provoked by anxiety that can slow labour.

Critics of water birth are concerned about the potential harm to the baby, mainly through getting water in the lungs, and the risk of infection. Because of the potential risk for harm, Eastern Health has developed a water birth training program and an accreditation process for clinicians to ensure a high standard of care for women.

A tool to assist you with your discussions and decision making with your midwife or doctor regarding the use of water immersion as a strategy to support you in labour is on the reverse of this document

Water immersion recommended if

- You are pregnant with a single baby, in a ‘fixed’ head down position
- You go into labour without intervention, between 37 and 42 weeks
- You have no medical illnesses or complications affecting your pregnancy
- You have had the opportunity to discuss the potential benefits and risks of water immersion with your midwife or doctor in relation to your individual circumstances in antenatal clinic prior to labour

Water immersion is not recommended if

- You have an altered state of consciousness, or are unable to comply with instructions
- You have received pethidine/morphine in the last four hours, or you have had an epidural
- You have a complicated pregnancy, or medical conditions such as epilepsy or high blood pressure
- You have mobility issues that may restrict you from getting out of the bath at any time
- There are reasons why your baby needs continuous monitoring during labour
- The labour is induced using prostin or oxytocin
- The labour onset is before 37 weeks or after 42 weeks
- You have a BMI > 35 at booking

Conditions for using a the bath for labour and/ or water birth

- You can leave the bath whenever you choose
- The bath water temperature must be monitored by the midwife, and the water level should reach to the level of your breasts
- You should drink plenty of cool fluid to prevent dehydration
- You must leave the bath when advised to do so for safety reasons
- The bath water should not have any additives (such as soap or essential oils)

If you wish for a water birth:

- There must be water birth accredited midwives/ doctors available to care for you
- You may need to stand up to facilitate the birth
- The baby must be brought to the surface as soon as it is born and its head remain above water at all times
- The baby must be kept warm
- You must leave the water following birth for delivery of the placenta

Discussion and decision making tool

Discussion	Agree	Disagree	Questions to ask the midwife or doctor
I am a well woman having a healthy pregnancy without complications for me or my baby		Use of the bath is not recommended in this circumstance	
I feel more comfortable in a warm bath or shower when I have discomfort, aches or pains			
I think that I will be more relaxed in the bath and more able to cope with labour			
I know that I really want an epidural			
I understand that I can use 'gas' when I am in the bath for extra pain relief, but will need to leave the bath for an injection of pethidine or an epidural			
I will agree to leave the bath if requested to do so by the midwife or doctor		Use of the bath is not recommended in this circumstance	
I am happy for the baby to be monitored by the midwife listening to it regularly when I am in labour			
I understand that should any abnormalities be detected with the baby's heart rate I will need to leave the bath		Use of the bath is not recommended in this circumstance	
I want the baby to be monitored continually when I am in labour using a machine	Use of the bath is not recommended in this circumstance		
I have no problems getting into and out of the bath		Use of the bath is not recommended in this circumstance	

Discussion	Agree	Disagree	Questions to ask the midwife or doctor
I know that if the baby comes before 37 weeks or my labour is induced that using the bath is not recommended, due to the increased risks for the baby		Use of the bath is not recommended in this circumstance	
If my labour progresses normally I want to give birth in the water			
I understand that if there is not a water birth accredited midwife on duty that I will need to leave the bath for the birth			

Further information and reading:

1. Cluett ER, Burns E. Immersion in water in labour and birth. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2009, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD000111. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD000111.pub3.
2. www.waterbirth.org.au
3. <http://www.ranzcog.edu.au/component/content/article/270-revised-statement-guidelines/424-warm-water-immersion-in-labour-and-birth-c-obs-24.html>

Updated August 2014. This document has been developed having regard to general circumstances, in light of information available to the authors at the time of preparation. Please discuss your options with your midwife or doctor in relation to your own personal circumstances. If this is a hard copy it may not be the latest version of this document.

Protecting Your Privacy

Eastern Health is committed to protecting your privacy. We will keep your personal information secure and will disclose information about you only when required by law. We comply with relevant information and privacy legislation. If you would like more information, please ask a staff member or visit our Web site www.easternhealth.org.au
Eastern Health is accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards.

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