

Birthing Pool Information Leaflet



The Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital has a Birthing Pool available on the Delivery Suite for use by women who are healthy, with an uncomplicated, singleton pregnancy, presenting in labour at term (37 – 42 weeks pregnant). At present, the pool is reserved for the use of women who consent to participate in our research study known as 'Use of water immersion during labour and birth – an organisational change project and prospective preference cohort study'.

If you meet the inclusion criteria for pool use you will be given information and invited to participate in the study. If you consent to enter the study, you may choose to use the pool for labour only and exit the pool for the birth of your baby. Alternatively, you may wish to remain in the pool to give birth. Either way your midwife will guide and assist you.

Background

The use of water for labour and birth can be traced back to ancient times. It provides an alternative option for comfort, mobility and privacy.

The debate for and against the use of a birthing pool

Labouring in water may shorten the length of labour. Water may have a relaxing quality and the need for pain relieving drugs may be reduced. As with any situation where one seeks comfort and relaxation, a warm bath may prove to be invaluable. The chances of a normal birth may be increased and the overall experience of childbirth may be enhanced when women use baths/pools.

However, there are risks to everything in life and no birth can be totally 'risk free' therefore, in order for you to make an informed decision about using the birthing pool, it is important for you to be aware of such risks.

Giving birth in water has resulted in a small number of serious incidents that do not occur out of water, such as water inhalation and drowning. In order to protect against this and in keeping with international best practice, we adopt a 'hands off' approach during birth to avoid stimulating the baby to take a breath. Your midwife will remain close by continuously monitoring the birth.

It is unclear whether birth in water may be associated with increased risk of severe perineal trauma (3rd and 4th degree tears). However, if such tears occur, once a woman receives correct care, management and follow up, most women heal well and have little after effects. Some studies have shown an increase in umbilical cord snapping. Should this occur, your midwife, who is trained for such eventualities, will act appropriately to minimise negative effects on you/baby. In the small group of women who have birthed in water in this hospital, we have seen an increase in the rate of 3rd/4th degree tears. We have had no incidence of cord snapping. We have seen a lower rate of caesarean section and a higher rate of normal vaginal birth. This data continues to be collected, reviewed and reported.

Women are screened for risk factors in order to assess suitability for use of the birthing pool. Both the mother and baby are monitored carefully by the midwife whilst using the pool. It is in this way that we seek to minimise the risk and safeguard mother and baby. If your midwife has any concerns, she will explain these to you and ask you to exit the pool.

Conditions for using the pool

- You must be healthy, with an uncomplicated pregnancy.
- Be between 37-42 weeks pregnant.
- The pool water should be comfortably warm, with no additives.
- When sitting in the pool the water should cover your tummy.
- You can leave the pool at any time you wish.
- You are strongly recommended to leave the pool when advised to do so for safety reasons. This may include a change in our ability to provide you with the continuous presence of your midwife.



What should I wear?

Most women choose to bathe naked in the pool, however you may feel more comfortable wearing a bra, bikini top or t-shirt. It is your choice to make yourself comfortable and to do what feels right for you. You are advised to pack extra towels and a bath robe so that you do not get cold, as you are likely to get in and out of the pool several times during your labour.

When can I get into the pool?

You must be in labour to use the pool, have read the *Birthing Pool Information Booklet*, the *Study Information Sheet* and signed the consent form.

When do I get out of the pool?

Whenever you feel you want to. Women have differing urges to get in and out of the pool, so do follow your instinct. If you have been in the pool for a long time, your midwife may recommend that you exit it for a break. A break may offer greater benefits once you return to the pool. You may wish to get out of the pool yourself at any time to mobilise, eat/drink, reposition/rest. Your midwife may also ADVISE/REQUEST you to leave the pool if s/he has any concerns about you or your baby's wellbeing.



How can I cope with the contractions when I am in the pool?

As your labour will have started naturally and will have progressed naturally, it is helpful to concentrate on the power of your body to labour and birth. Your body will release your own natural painkillers known as endorphins and whilst they do not relieve all the discomfort of the contractions, it is important to concentrate on the fact that each contraction of your womb lasts about one minute and that your body relaxes thereafter until the next contraction. Remember, every contraction has a job to do and that job is to assist in the birth of your baby. Breathing slowly and deeply is helpful in assisting you tune in to the rhythms of your body and this can be effective in helping you cope with each contraction.

What else can I use for pain relief when I am in the pool?

You can use Entonox (gas and air) under midwifery guidance, when you are in the pool. A pethidine injection is contraindicated while you are in the pool as it can make you drowsy, for this reason, if you have had pethidine you must wait 8 hours before you can use the pool.

Can I eat or drink when using the pool?

It is important that you keep hydrated; your birth partner can help to remind you to take regular fluids and some light diet to keep up your stamina.

How will midwives care for me in the pool?

Your midwife will aim to create a private, secure, calm, and relaxed environment. S/he will encourage you as necessary and disturb you as little as possible. As part of your care during labour and birth, your midwife will listen to your baby's heartbeat, check your temperature, pulse and blood pressure regularly throughout.

Of note: Presently the Coombe has one birthing pool, which means only one woman can be accommodated at a time. So, you may need to wait your turn, or opt for an alternative. Either way, your midwife will support and advise you.

For further information contact:

Ann Fergus, Clinical Midwife Manager 3 of the Delivery Suite afergus@coombe.ie (01-4085210) or contact Paula Barry, Research Midwife pbarry@coombe.ie. (01-4085648).

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET REGARDING THE STUDY

Use of water immersion during labour and birth – an organisational change project and prospective preference cohort study.

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted in the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital. Please take time to read this information sheet carefully before you decide to take part in this study. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. You can discuss it with your partner, relatives, friends and your midwife or doctor if you wish. Please ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

1. Study Title

Use of water immersion during labour and birth – an organisational change project and prospective preference cohort study

2. What is the purpose of this study?

The Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital aims to provide women with a broad range of options for pain relief in labour. Water immersion by means of a birthing pool is available in one of our labour rooms and has proven popular with some women. The use of the pool was intended initially for pain relief in labour and has been extended to use for birth on an interim basis. An audit of the first 50 births is complete and a decision has been made that a full evaluation should be undertaken within a research framework. We aim to assess the benefits and risks of water immersion during labour and birth, the use of staff resources, and the quality of the birth experience from the perspective of the labouring woman, her birth partner and the midwife caring for her. We hope that this robust evaluation will contribute helpful information for other centres in Ireland and elsewhere, as well as informing how we develop our own services.

The purpose of this study is to compare the outcomes of three groups of women

- i) Women who give birth in the pool
- ii) Women who labour in the pool but give birth out of the pool
- iii) Women who are eligible for use of the pool but choose not to use the pool

3. Who can take part in this study?

Healthy woman with an uncomplicated pregnancy who on admission to the labour ward meet the study inclusion criteria, and a normal birth is anticipated.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you will have been given this information sheet and additional information regarding the study during your antenatal visits/classes. You will be asked to sign a consent form, which is located on the back page of the information leaflet. Consent needs to be signed at least 24 hours prior to you presenting in labour. The best thing to do is once completed, return it to your midwife/doctor at your next antenatal visit, so it can be filed in your maternity chart. It will be discussed again on your admission in labour, and if you decide you are still happy to participate, your consent form will be counter

signed by your admitting midwife. If you do not want to take part or if you decide you would like to drop out of the study at any point, you do not have to give a reason and you would not be pressured to change your mind.

Unfortunately at the present time, **it is only possible to use the birthing pool within the context of the research study** that is ongoing.

5. What will happen during the study?

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. There are two elements to the study:

- i) Routinely collected data will be recorded from your maternity chart and used anonymously for research purposes.
- ii) You, your partner, midwife and midwifery student will be asked to complete a short questionnaire evaluating your birth experience and the experience of care provision.

6. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you during the course of the study will be kept strictly confidential. A researcher on the study will need to review your hospital record for information about your pregnancy and birth. The information will be used in a way that will not allow you to be identified individually. A study sticker will be inserted into your maternity chart to inform all health professionals involved in your care that you are participating in the study.

7. What will happen to the results of this study?

We hope to be able to provide clear information on potential benefits and risks of using water immersion for labour and birth within a hospital setting. Reports will be produced at the end of the study and will be published in midwifery and medical journals. If you would like us to send you a copy of the published study, please let us know sometime during your involvement in the study.

8. Who is organising and funding the study?

The study is being organised jointly by Trinity College Dublin and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital. Some funding has been received by the Nursing & Midwifery Practice Development Unit to employ a research midwife part-time.

9. Contact for further information:

If you need any further information or clarification, please contact:

- Paula Barry, Research Midwife (01-4085648)
- Ann Fergus, CMM3, Delivery Suite
- Prof Deirdre Murphy, Consultant Obstetrician

Hospital Number: _____

Initials _____

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY

Use of water immersion during labour and birth – an organisational change project and prospective preference cohort study.

This form must be completed and signed by you as the research participant at least 24 hours prior to your labour commencing. On admission to the assessment unit/labour ward, your midwife will ensure you meet the study inclusion criteria and that you are still happy to participate. S/he will then countersign this consent form.

Please tick appropriate response

Have you read and understood the Pool Information Booklet

Yes No

Have you read and understood the Study Information Leaflet?

Yes No

Have you been given an opportunity to ask questions and further discuss this study?

Yes No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?

Yes No

Have you now received enough information about this study?

Yes No

Who have you spoken to? Midwife Doctor Research Midwife

Do you understand that your participation is entirely voluntary?

Yes No

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time?

Yes No

- Without having to give a reason for withdrawing?
Yes No
- Without this affecting your present or future maternity care?
Yes No

Do you agree that your records in this research and supporting maternity records be made available for inspection by monitors from?

- University of Dublin? Yes No
- Regulatory authorities? Yes No

Do you agree to take part in this study? Yes No

I confirm that I have had at least 24 hours to read the Information Leaflet titled 'Birthing Pool Information leaflet' and the Study Information Leaflet and am making an informed decision.

Yes No **N/A (for control group ONLY)**

Woman's signature.....Date.....

Woman's name in block capital letters

.....

Assessment unit/DS Midwife check list:

- woman has signed the consent
- is suitable to use the pool
- is willing to participate

Signature:.....Date.....



Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital

www.coombe.ie

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