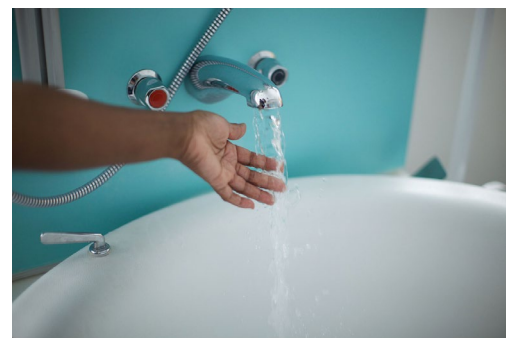




# Use of water for labour and birth (water births): What you need to know

This card will have been given to you by your midwife because you have requested to use the birthing pool/bath, or the midwife has recommended this for you. Please take a few minutes to read this information and if you have any further questions please ask.



## Why use water?

There is good evidence that submerging in water during labour can reduce the level of pain experienced. Warm water helps you to relax, which will encourage your production of endorphins, the body's natural source of pain relief as well as the hormone oxytocin, which stimulates contractions. The buoyancy of water allows you to change position more easily, which also has a positive effect.

## What will happen?

It is important that the water is maintained at a warm and comfortable temperature during the first stage of labour. Your midwife will keep checking the temperature of the water and your temperature to ensure you are not getting too hot. If you stay in the pool for the second stage of labour (pushing stage), the water will be maintained between 37 and 37.5°C. To do this, your midwife will empty some water and top the pool up with warm water at intervals. You may be asked to temporarily leave the pool for this to happen safely. This will give you an ideal opportunity to empty your bladder, which your midwife will encourage you to do regularly. You are also encouraged to remain hydrated by drinking water or non-fizzy sports drinks.

Entonox is the only other form of pain relief that can be used in the pool. You will need to wait at least two hours before you can go into the water if you have had Pethidine or Diamorphine.

When your baby is born, he/she will be lifted promptly to the surface by your midwife. You may wish to help with this.

The placenta can be delivered in or out of the water; your midwife will discuss this with you during your labour.



## Leaving the pool for the birth

In the UK, water births are just as safe for mothers and their babies as giving birth out of the water (POOL Study, 2024). Your midwife will discuss your wishes for the second stage of labour with you and will recommend that you leave the water if she suspects any deviations from normal at any time. For example, this may be due to concerns with the baby's heart rate or slow progress in labour.

**Reference:** Sanders J, Barlow C, Brocklehurst P, Cannings-John R, Channon S, Cutter J, et al. Maternal and neonatal outcomes among spontaneous vaginal births occurring in or out of water following intrapartum water immersion: The POOL cohort study. *BJOG*. 2024;00:1–10.