

### WATERBIRTH:

#### What is a Waterbirth?

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A waterbirth refers to a birth where a part of your labour, delivery or both happen in a deep birth pool filled with warm water. It can be at your home, a birthing centre or in a hospital setting, preferably under the care of your midwife or doctor (Webb MD, 2022). There are differences in refences, with some research defining waterbirth as actually birthing the baby under water and not just being immersed in water during the first stage of labour. (Aughey et al., 2021)

For a woman to be considered eligible to give birth in a waterbirth setting, it is important to meet a certain criteria:

- Full term, low-risk pregnancy
- No signs of infection or other medical conditions
- Singleton pregnancy
- No history of high blood pressure or bleeding disorders
- No complications during pregnancy or early labour
- Must meet a pre-pregnancy BMI criterion of under 35 (The Mother and Baby Centre, 2022).

#### **Benefits of waterbirth**

- 1. Relaxation: More pain-inhibiting hormones (Oxytocin and endorphins) and less stressinducing (Epinephrine and norepinephrine) hormones are released.
- 2. Ease of movement: Woman have more buoyancy, woman feel lighter, have a more comfortable posture and more room for movement.
- 3. Woman who have a waterbirth are more likely to get through birth with no or minimal pain medication. (Dekker, 2024)
- 4. Improved circulation
- 5. Reduced risk for tearing due to a more relaxed body and warmth on the perineum (causing vasodilation an increased blood supply). Perineum is more elastic. Less need for an episiotomy. (American Association of Pediatrics, 2024)
- 6. Fewer medical interventions
- 7. Shorter duration of labour and birth and overall a better birth experience (Ulfsdottir et al., 2018)

#### How is a waterbirth safe?

While the baby is developing in the uterus, they get all the oxygen they need from the placenta and umbilical cord, and not through breathing with their own mouth and lungs. When birth happens in water, the environment in which the baby is born is similar to the amniotic sac. Therefore, the baby will not take a breath under water.

It is only when the baby's head comes above the water, that the nerve receptors in their cheeks stimulate them to take their first breath, and start to use their lungs to get oxygen. **Possible Risks:** 

- Infection
- Delayed medical intervention in the case of an emergency.
- Overheating/dehydration if the temperature of the water is too hot.
- Baby breathes too early It happens rarely but is possible.
- Umbilical cord can break (avulsion) before the baby comes out of the water (Ulfsdottir et.al., 2018)

Even though there are several studies that show the amazing benefits of water immersion during labour and birth, there are still biased opinions that form the basis of some hospital guidelines. It is therefor VERY IMPORTANT to discuss this matter with your HEALTH CARE PROVIDER and determine what would be the BEST OPTION FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY.



# **References:**

- 1. Ulfsdottir H, Saltvedt S, Georgsson S. Waterbirth in Sweden a comparative study. Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand 2018; 97: 341–348.
- Harper B. Birth, bath, and beyond: the science and safety of water immersion during labor and birth. J Perinat Educ. 2014 Summer;23(3):124–34. doi: 10.1891/1058– 1243.23.3.124. PMID: 25364216; PMCID: PMC4210671.
- 3. Aughey, H., Jardine, J., Moitt, N. et al. Waterbirth: a national retrospective cohort study of factors associated with its use among women in England. BMC Pregnancy Childbirth 21, 256 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-021-03724-6
- 4. C. Clews, et al., Women and waterbirth: A systematic meta-synthesis of qualitative studies, Women Birth (2019), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2019.11.007
- 5. Dekker, R. (2018) Water immersion during labor for pain relief, Evidence Based Birth®. Available at: https://evidencebasedbirth.com/water-immersion-during-labor-for-painrelief/ (Accessed: 18 March 2024).