



— Time to Talk —

WATER BIRTHS

Marina Fogle & Dr Chiara Hunt

THE SISTERS DISCUSS THE BENEFITS OF TAKING THE PLUNGE

When we discuss pain relief options in The Bump Class, women are often surprised to see water at the top of our list. That's right, not needles, not drugs – water can be a great help to women throughout their labours. The vast majority of women find that being in the bath in the early stages of labour really helps ease the intensity of contractions, but wish they could be more upright and mobile in this watery environment, which is why so many birth centres and labour wards now offer a birth pool in which women can labour.

The feeling of weightlessness makes women more comfortable but it's also a lot easier to get into the squatting positions that are so great for labour, but difficult to maintain out of the water. The water also eases the pain of contractions (which a lot of women only come to realise once they get out) and reduces your

risk of tearing. But it is also safe to deliver your baby in the water.

If there are any concerns about you or your baby, the midwife will recommend that you get out, but all being well, you can spend as long as you like in the birth pool.

You should have your own dedicated midwife on hand for your water birth. While they will not get into the pool with you, they will support and encourage you from the sides, using a mirror and a torch to examine your perineum and your baby's progress, and you can use gas and air if you want.

With one contraction your baby's head will be born and because she does not want to stimulate your baby to breathe, the midwife will not handle the baby unless she has to. With the next contraction, your baby's body will be born and the midwife will reach down and gently pass your baby to you, allowing you to bring her to

the surface and watch that very special moment as she take her first breath.

Many women worry that giving birth in the water carries with it a risk of the baby drowning. But remember that right now your baby is floating happily in a watery environment inside your uterus, not using her lungs at all. Once you reach the pushing stage, the midwives are careful to keep the water temperature exactly the same as your body temperature. Because babies are only stimulated to breath with the cold air hitting their face and by being handled, it is very safe. The midwife will handle baby as little as possible in the water and your baby will be oxygenated through the umbilical cord until she takes her first breath.

Birth pools aren't cheap, easy pieces of kit to install and the NHS would not have gone to all the trouble and expense to consistently include them in their

facilities if there wasn't a huge amount of evidence showing how beneficial they are in labour. We always recommend giving a birth pool a try. If it's not for you or you want a stronger method of pain relief, such as an epidural, you can get out any time you want. That said, approach your labour with an open mind. If the professionals are recommending that you get out of the pool for you or your baby's safety, remember that they only have your best interests at heart.

Time and time again we hear women rave about the experience they had in the birth pool. So do ask whether this is something your hospital can accommodate and give it a go! 

Dr Chiara Hunt and Marina Fogle are founders of The Bump Class, which provides antenatal classes in South Kensington and Parsons Green. thebumpclass.com