

Benefits of Water Birth

Evidence-Based Highlights for Families & Birth Professionals

Water immersion during labor and birth has been associated with many physical and emotional benefits for healthy women with uncomplicated pregnancies. Research from systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and large observational studies continues to support water immersion as a safe and effective option when proper protocols are followed.

• NATURAL PAIN RELIEF

- *Warm water immersion may significantly reduce labor pain and discomfort*
- *Many women report feeling calmer, more relaxed, and better able to cope with contractions*
- *Studies show decreased use of epidurals, spinal analgesia, and injected pain medications*

• INCREASED RELAXATION & REDUCED STRESS

- *The buoyancy and warmth of water can promote relaxation and lower anxiety during labor*
- *Water immersion may help reduce stress hormones and support physiologic labor progression*

• GREATER FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- *Water allows laboring mothers to move more freely and find comfortable positions*
- *Improved mobility may support fetal positioning and labor progress.*

• SHORTER LABOR

- *Multiple studies have shown shorter labor durations, particularly during the first and second stages of labor*

• FEWER INTERVENTIONS

- Research has associated water immersion with:
- *Reduced need for labor augmentation*
 - *Lower episiotomy rates*
 - *Reduced use of induction and amniotomy*
 - *Lower rates of pharmacologic pain relief*

• INCREASED MATERNAL SATISFACTION & SENSE OF CONTROL

- *Women frequently describe water birth as more comfortable, empowering, calming, and satisfying compared to previous births on land*

• POSITIVE NEONATAL OUTCOMES

- *Large reviews and cohort studies have not found increased risk of adverse neonatal outcomes for healthy pregnancies attended with appropriate care protocols*
- *Studies report comparable Apgar scores and no increase in NICU admissions in most low-risk settings*

NOTE: *Water birth is not appropriate for every pregnancy or clinical situation. Decisions about labor and birth options should always be made in partnership with qualified healthcare providers and based on individual health needs, facility protocols, and current evidence-based guidelines.*

Selected References

Burns E. et al. BMJ Open (2022) Systematic Review & Meta-analysis
McKinney J.A. et al. American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology (2024)
ACOG Committee Opinion: Immersion in Water During Labor and Delivery
Mollamahmutoglu L. et al. Journal of the Turkish German Gynecological Association (2012)
POOL Study – University of Cardiff / NHS Waterbirth Research

WATERBIRTH INTERNATIONAL
40 years of Education and Birth Care Advocacy
FOR MORE INFO: waterbirth.org