

All We Need to Know About Water Birth: An Overview

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Abstract: *Water birth has many benefits such as reduced pain, shortened duration of labor, decreased used of analgesics, ability to change position during labor, and many more. In India, not many people know about it and hence is less often practiced. The article discusses about water birth, its pros and cons, indications and contraindications, complications, and alternatives.*

Keywords: Water birth, labor pain, labor duration, awareness

1. Introduction

Water birth is a process of giving birth which has been followed by the Western countries over the past few decades in which some prefer to stay in the water during the first stage of labor whereas some choose to be in the water during the whole process of delivery.¹ The pool or tub is usually filled to the level of breast of the parturient so as to fully immerse the abdomen wherein a tub of approximately 4 feet wide and 2 feet depth, filled with warm water not exceeding 37.5 degrees for the first stage and 37 - 37.5 for the second and third stage of labor.² Studies suggest that water birth empowers the parturient, decreases pain, enhances the level of satisfaction of childbirth, and enables relaxation as it can shorten the duration of the first stage of labor and reduces the necessity of analgesics and interventions.³

The first ever report about water birth was made in the year 1805 in a medical journal and it became familiar in 1980s and 1990s. Later in early 2000s, the American Academy of Pediatrics declared their statement regarding water birth stating: there had not been research conducted on water birth, it endangers the newborn, and there were no benefits to the mothers. But, on the contrary, many researchers had been from all around the globe had been studying and conducting researches on waterbirth for decades, and had uncovered that waterbirth possesses more benefits than the risks.⁴

2. Review of Literature

A randomized, prospective, experimental study was conducted in the midwestern suburbs of Johannesburg, South Africa. A sum of 120 participants were engaged of which 60 were randomly assigned for waterbirth and 60 for conventional birth. The result revealed that waterbirth significantly reduced the parturients' level of pain and were more satisfied with their ability to cope with labor.⁵

A randomized control trial was conducted in Shaheed Akbarabadi Hospital, Iran University of Medical Sciences where 106 women were enrolled in which 53 were engaged in control group and 53 in experimental group. The results showed that, women giving birth in water experienced less pain and the duration of labor were comparatively shortened. The use of drugs like oxytocin, antispasmodic, opiates, and

analgesics were less frequent in the experimental group than the control group.⁶

Who can opt for water birth?

- Willing mothers
- Mothers with more than 37 weeks of gestation.
- Low risks pregnancies
- Healthy pregnancy⁷
- Medically and physically fit
- Previous history of C - section¹⁴

Who should avoid and in which conditions?

- Women below 17 or above 35
- Multiple pregnancies
- History of complications and communicable diseases during pregnancy
- Breech position
- Premature baby
- PROM
- Irregular or no FHR
- Mothers under sedation
- Macrosomia
- Infection^{8,9}

What are the pros of water birth?

- Enhances birthing satisfaction⁵
- Reduces pain experiences during labor⁶
- The catecholamine and stress hormone decreases during water birth thereby shortening the duration of labor¹⁰
- The mother is not limited to a certain position and can be in different positions during delivery
- Improves blood circulation
- The risks of perineal tear are reduced due to the relaxed body¹¹
- Lowers the frequency of usage of pharmacological drugs to relief pain⁶
- The risk of postpartum hemorrhage is also reduced¹²
- The need of interventions is reduced¹³

What are the risks and complications of water birth?

- Cord avulsion⁷
- Meconium aspiration
- Drowning
- Infection
- Limited options for pain management
- Overheating or dehydration¹³

What are the alternatives to ease labour?

- Hot shower
- Birthing ball
- Relaxation techniques
- Moving around
- Warm compress
- Breathing exercises
- Music therapy
- Aromatherapy¹³

3. Conclusion

Many people are not aware of water birth in India. There are various misconceptions regarding baby's breathing, passing of mother's stool in the pool or tub, etc. People should be made aware about these misconceptions through proper awareness programs and education. The pros of water birth outweigh the cons. Proper training and education must be provided to the healthcare professionals of the area concerned. As water birth is a labor process with less use of medications and interventions with many benefits compared with complications, people can opt for it. The practice in India is very infrequent for now but with proper education, awareness, and training programs, water birth can bring a change in the birthing process.

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