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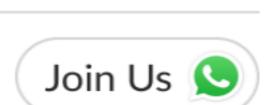
## The benefits and risks of water births: A historical perspective

By Hindustan Times

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This article is authored by Inderjeet Kaur, director of midwifery and Adela Hamilton, clinical education and development lead, Fernandez Foundation.



Newborn (representational)(AP)

The practise of giving birth in a warm pool of water has gained popularity in recent years as an alternative to conventional hospital deliveries. Proponents argue that water births offer numerous benefits, including relaxation, stress relief, and drugfree pain management. Most importantly, it is commonly linked to a more positive and fulfilling birth experience. However, like any medical procedure, water births come with their own set of risks and considerations.

The concept of water births has a long history dating back to traditional societies, where rituals and practises of childbirth were often shrouded in secrecy and passed down through generations of women. One of the most notable historical examples of water births can be found in the warm sea waters of the South Pacific islands. Women in these societies were drawn to the sea to give birth, finding solace and comfort in the natural surroundings. These practises reflect the innate human connection to water as a source of comfort and relaxation during the birthing process.

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In Europe, the documented use of water in childbirth dates back to 1805. However, it wasn't until recent decades that water births gained recognition as a formal approach to childbirth in medical settings.

In 2007, India witnessed its first recorded water birth in Delhi, marking a significant moment in the global acceptance and adoption of water births as an alternative delivery method. This event highlights the growing interest and willingness to explore alternative approaches to childbirth, emphasising the importance of maternal comfort and relaxation during labour.

Warm water in birthing pools can provide natural pain relief during labour by promoting relaxation and reducing muscle tension. This supports the release of natural endorphins, which further relaxes women and helps them manage pain without using drugs. Research suggests that using hydrotherapy for pain relief reduces the need for the intervention of epidural analgesia. Warm water can promote better blood circulation, which may help relieve pain and reduce the risk of complications.

Immersion in water can create a soothing and calming environment, reducing stress and anxiety for the labouring mother.

Buoyancy in water enables increased mobility and freedom of movement during labour, making it easier for women to find comfort and give birth in preferred positions.

The evidence also suggests that water births may reduce the risk of severe perineal tearing. However, more research is needed to confirm this. The baby's well-being is evaluated with a fetal doppler, an underwater apparatus.

Not all women will be offered this option. There are considerations, such as a premature baby or any medical concerns. There is a potential risk of infection for both the mother and the baby if the water in the birthing pool is poorly maintained or if there are complications during the birth.

Maintaining the water temperature at an appropriate level is crucial, as water that is too hot or cold is unsuitable for birthing.

While water can relieve pain, it may not be sufficient for all women, and some may still require additional options to manage the surges. You may also need to leave the water if your midwife identifies any concerns or changes to your baby's heartbeat or your blood pressure changes.

Not all healthcare facilities offer water birth as an option, and not all healthcare providers are trained in the practise.

In conclusion, water births offer a natural and relaxing approach to childbirth, rooted in historical practises and offering potential benefits. However, it's essential for expectant mothers to carefully assess the risks and benefits, consult with healthcare professionals, and choose what aligns with their preferences and medical needs. Ultimately, the decision to pursue a water birth should prioritise the safety and well-being of both the mother and the baby, enabling women to have more control and choice in their birthing experience. Women see this as an opportunity to keep birth as physiological as possible and to be heard and have control of the birth rather than a vessel to birth.

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