



TOOLKIT FOR LABOUR

by

LOLA & LYKKE®



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As your pregnancy progresses, your thoughts around labour can feel mixed, especially when you don't know what to expect. Therefore, we have taken as much of the unknown as we can out of the equation and prepared for you, a guide to help you and your partner feel prepared.

We've covered all the topics you'll want to read up on from creating your ideal birth environment, to pain relief and what to pack in your hospital bag!

Throughout this guide you will notice there are sections that you can write in and personalise, so you make this your very own toolkit for labour.



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Preparing for labour

Birth Plan

Preparing a birth plan for labour will help you establish your thoughts, expectations, and requests before labour starts. It also gives your birth partner and midwife an idea of how to support you throughout labour and act upon any requests you've raised. Your birth partner will be your advocate, so having your contributions written down will help your voice be heard if you cannot advocate for yourself.

Some mums question if they need a birth plan however it's better to have a plan in place than be without and risk feeling like you have no control over what is happening, and decisions being made on your behalf.

What do I include in my birth plan?

The most obvious questions you will want to answer first are:

- How are you planning to give birth, natural labour, induction, vaginally or elected c-section? And what are your reasons for this?
- Where do you plan on the birth taking place? In your home, birth centre, local hospital, etc.?
- What types of pain relief do you want/do not want during your labour?

Some of these variables may be taken out of your control for various reasons but your voice will always be heard and listened to. Medical professionals will explain the reasons behind their actions before going ahead and they require your consent to do so, but in some cases, they are deciding for you to save life.

You may also want to consider what type of environment you want to create for your labour, especially if you have opted for a c-section, an operating theatre can often have a very different vibe to a birth centre, for example.

Birth Plan Worksheet

Questions to include on the worksheet:

- Do you want to be told the sex of your baby or discover it for yourself?
- Do you or your partner want to clamp the umbilical cord?
- Do you want immediate skin-to-skin contact?
- How are you planning to feed your baby, breastfeeding or formula milk?
- Do you want to see the placenta after it has been delivered?

Questions to consider for c-section delivery:

- Do you want the operation to be screened off or do you want a transparent screen so you can see what's happening?
- Do you want the surgeon to tilt the mirror so you can see your baby being born?
- Or would you prefer to keep the screen up until the surgeon has finished stitching your incision?
- Do you want silence in the operating theatre, so the baby hears your voice first?
- Or would you prefer a running commentary to be informed of what is happening?

Notes

With any labour, you can't ever tell how long you will stay in the hospital. Even if the baby's birth goes smoothly, there is a good chance that you will need to stay in the hospital for a night. The simplest way to pack your hospital bag (or bags!) is to list items that mum needs, then baby items and anything extra that your partner wants to bring. Although your partner may not be able to stay overnight in the hospital with you, it's a good idea to pack a change of clothes!

Here are some ideas to get you started on essential items you will want to pack in your hospital bag.

Labour and birth essentials for Mum:

- **Loose, comfortable clothing:** t-shirts, leggings, joggers, nursing/sleep bras, underwear, socks, and nursing pads.
- **Toiletries:** large maternity pads/underwear, toothbrush, toothpaste, flannel, shower gel, shampoo, cotton buds, facial wipes, hairbrush, hairbands, nipple cream, lip balm. Consider using unscented toiletries as your baby will love your natural scent.
- **Footwear:** slippers, flip flops (to use in shower rooms), or shoes that slip on easily in case you're not able to bend down.
- **Phone and charger:** charging cables, earphones, power bank, iPod.
- **Other:** Pillows, dressing gown, snacks, exercise ball, book, peppermint teabags (relieve trapped wind and nausea), postpartum support band (to support your weakened tummy muscles after birth).

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Essential items for baby:

- **Clothing:** pack x2 outfits per day, for a minimum of 3 days. It's also handy if you pack a mixture of sizes just in case your baby is smaller or larger than expected. You will need baby grows, sleepsuits, socks, hand mittens, cotton hats, dribble bibs, etc. Layers work well so you can strip them down if they're getting too warm.
- **Nappies and wipes:** for the first few weeks you should only be using water wipes when changing your baby. Bring a whole packet of nappies as you never know how many you'll need! Again, bring some preemie and newborn sizes just in case your baby is smaller at birth than you expected. Nappy cream, cotton wool, disposable changing mats and nappy sacks are also worth packing.
- **Feeding:** depending on whether you are breastfeeding or using baby formula, you'll need to bring some of these items; pre-made formula bottles, breast pump, breast milk storage bags, permanent marker (to date/mark your breast milk bags), manual breast pump (haakaa cup), nursing pillow, muslins.
- **Other:** baby blanket, comforter.

Important: Some hospitals will not let you leave by car without a car seat. They will come round to your bed before you leave to check that baby has been strapped in correctly before discharging you.



Understanding your hormones

Hormones are, would you believe it, wonderful things. Not only can they provide you with natural pain relief, but they can also help your labour to progress effectively, so long as you have them under control. Hormones are the body's way of sending chemical messages to different parts of the body. There is a fine balance to get your hormones level for optimal performance. Achieving this will help you to feel in control and relaxed throughout your labour as it progresses.

On the flip side, if the balance of your hormones is out of kilter, mum and baby are more likely to experience a trickier labour. There are many variables to this but some of the side effects can be that your labour slows down or stops completely and intervention from your midwife or doctors are more likely.

Relaxin

It's all in the name! The hormone, relaxin, helps the joints and ligaments in your pelvis to soften, enabling your pelvis to open during labour. Moving around during labour can help you fully take advantage of the benefits this hormone produces.

Oxytocin

When oxytocin is flowing freely and undisturbed, you will feel a sense of calm and control. Oxytocin is primarily responsible for causing the womb to contract during labour and birth. The more oxytocin you have, the more effective your contractions will be in preparing your baby to be born. When oxytocin is reduced your labour can slow down or stop altogether. Known causes that hinder oxytocin levels are the release of adrenaline, feelings of fear, lack of support or sensory issues such as hunger, thirst, or bright lights. There are lots of techniques shared throughout this guide that will help you to sustain and promote the production of oxytocin.



Endorphins

The feel-good pain-relieving hormone! When endorphins are released during labour and childbirth, your body's natural reaction is to relieve you of some of the pain you feel. Optimising the flow of endorphins can make all the difference to enhance your chances of vaginal delivery and lessen the chances for other forms of pain relief to be administered. Your level of endorphins can be affected if your adrenaline hormone starts to kick in and this will make it more difficult to manage your pain. Methods such as massage, positive affirmations, and remaining calm and relaxed are all ways to help your body release endorphins.

Adrenaline and Nor-Adrenaline

This hormone is the one you need to keep at bay throughout your labour and the birth of your baby. Adrenaline is produced when you feel stressed, anxious, hungry, cold or fearful. It can prevent your body from producing helpful hormones such as oxytocin and endorphins which ultimately make your labour progress. Nor-Adrenaline is released when your body experiences a "fight or flight" moment. During labour, these hormones will make you feel more pain and you may feel like you are losing control. Towards the end of your labour, however, they play a vital part in the final surge as your baby is born. At this moment, this mixture of hormones will awaken your baby and the mother will be more alert as the two of you meet for the first time.

Prolactin

Prolactin is the hormone responsible for enhancing the production of breast milk. It stimulates feelings of nurture between a mother and her baby and moments like skin-to-skin contact promotes this even more. Other hormones such as oxytocin and endorphins increase the amount of prolactin that's released in the body and all three of these hormones work in conjunction with one another. Prolactin also supports mothers who choose to breastfeed their newborn and helps babies to initiate the first feed.

Techniques to instigate labour

It's not all about spicy curries and long walks! There are many ways that you can naturally instigate labour. If you are nearing or past your due date, you can try some of these techniques to bring on labour. They don't always work, as every woman and every pregnancy is different, but it may just be the gentle push your baby needs!

Depending on where you are in the world, as some countries follow different guidance, your midwife or hospital may recommend booking a sweep or an induction or a planned c-section at 40+ weeks. If you have any complications during your pregnancy, it is unlikely they will let you go past 40 weeks (due date).



Here are some tips to induce the early stages of labour:

- **A gentle walk:** in the later stages of pregnancy you will feel slight pressure against your cervix which is often your baby's head as they get into position preparing themselves for birth.
- **Birthing ball:** gently rocking and bouncing on a birthing ball is a comfortable way of doing light exercise and it can also help the baby get into the correct position for birth.
- **Massaging your breasts:** We know what you're thinking, this sounds a bit strange! But actually, it can almost "trick" your body into thinking that your baby has arrived and your baby is suckling to bring on your milk. By alternating sides, stimulate each breast for 15 minutes for up to an hour. The nipple is thought to be a pressure point which will instigate labour.
- **Acupuncture:** you will need a professional who is specifically trained to perform acupuncture on pregnant women. It involves inserting needles into certain points on the body to release energy which acts upon specific organs or systems.
- **Sex:** Although it's probably not high on your list of things to do at 40+ weeks pregnant, having sex can bring on labour. It helps to increase the flow of oxytocin (feel-good, loving hormone) which assists your contractions during labour.

Labour

Setting the scene/birth environment

After deciding where you're going to have your baby, whether you are at home, in a birth centre or a hospital, you can think about how to create a calm, soothing environment to help you through labour and get those positive hormones flowing!

You want the room to help you feel at home, so you're comfortable and at ease. Some mothers like to play music, create an aroma with essential oils (note: only certain oils are suitable for this. [Click here for further guidance.](#)) or place electric tealights around the room to make the atmosphere feel more relaxed.

Think about what makes you happy and replicate this as best you can in the room. Here are some ideas to make your senses happy:

Sound

- What music do you enjoy?
- Do you have any favourite podcasts?
- Do you prefer silence?
- Do you like green noise and/or natural sounds?
- Do you want normal sounds around you like a conversation, rustling, light noises, etc.?





Taste

- What is your favourite drink? (Think pregnancy friendly!)
- Do you have any cravings for certain foods?
- What sweet treats do you like? Think sugared sweets or mints to keep your energy levels up and reduce any feelings of nausea.

Sight

- Do you prefer dim, bright, or natural light?
- Would clutter around the room be distracting to you?
- Covering the clock will stop you from getting caught up in how long your labour is lasting and comparing yourself against other mums.
- Have photos of your baby scan or family photos for encouragement.
- Fresh flowers make everyone smile. And they smell great too!

Touch

- Wear light, comfortable clothing so you don't get too hot or too cold.
- Hot and cold compress to soothe aches and pains as well as your temperature as it fluctuates.
- Bring comfortable blankets, throws or extra pillows so you feel comfy and supported.
- Your partner's touch, either a massage or just holding your hand can bring you love and encouragement.
- You might like access to hydrotherapy such as a warm bath, shower, or a birth pool.

Smell

- Do you like diffusers and essential oils? Which scent is your favourite? Remember to check that they are suitable for pregnant women to use.
- Room or linen sprays are another alternative to this.

Birth environment notes/ wants/wishes

Stages of labour

Some expecting mothers experience a slow early labour that steadily progresses over a few days or even a week. Others will have a shorter build-up to active labour and find that it's time to grab the hospital bag and go! There are different phases that women go through during labour. These are some of the symptoms you may experience during each stage.

Early labour

Your cervix is softening and you're starting to dilate up to 3cms. Your contractions at this point may have no regular pattern and will last for varying lengths, usually up to 30 seconds. The length you are in early labour is different for every woman and could last from a few hours to several days.

Active labour

Some may also call this established labour. You'll notice that your contractions are starting to become more regular, and they will last longer with a shorter amount of time in between each one. Your cervix is preparing itself for your baby to move down the birth canal and is dilating up to 10 cm.



Transition

This is the moment when it is important to focus on breathing techniques, so you remain calm and in control. For roughly 30 minutes, your body is going through stronger contractions, and you will feel more pressure in your lower back and bottom. Your cervix will have dilated to approximately 8-10 cm by this stage.

Second stage

Your cervix has now fully dilated (10 cm) and is ready to birth your baby. Your contractions, although still strong, may ease off slightly so you can gather your energy before you start to push. Your baby is moving down the birth canal with each contraction and will eventually start to crown. Once the baby's head is born, its body will rotate, and the shoulders followed by the rest of its body are born.

Third stage

Once your baby has been delivered your body will then birth the placenta as it detaches from the wall of the womb. Your baby's umbilical cord is clamped, and you can enjoy mother and baby cuddles with skin-to-skin contact. As your baby is making those early connections with you, they may find their way to the breast to instigate their first feed. Your midwife can support you with this to secure a good latch.



How your partner can help you through labour

From pregnancy days to when the baby finally arrives, there are lots of ways your birth partner can support you as you welcome your bundle of joy into the world. As well as supporting you, there is also support available for partners as they prepare for parenthood too. When the mother begins to labour there are certain actions that birth partners can do to support them.

Create the birth environment

Have everything you need to take to the hospital ready to grab and go, along with a copy of the birth plan. Create a calm and soothing environment to help the mother progress through labour in a positive space. You can even create a sign to go on the door, so people know beforehand when they enter, that this is a quiet and calm space (hypnobirthing).

Changing position/movement

As the mother progresses through labour, it's going to be trickier for her to move around comfortably. You can support her movement by supporting her weight slightly as she moves, guiding her around the room or setting up a chair, pillow, or birthing ball.



Advocacy

If she cannot voice her thoughts, wants, or wishes, you are her voice. Having a birth plan, for this reason, is important so that you are both (literally) on the same page before labour begins.

Nutrition and hydration

Although she may not have much of an appetite throughout labour, it's important to help her stay hydrated and keep her energy levels up. Fill a water bottle and keep it close to hand. Prepare some light snacks or sugared treats to give her an energy boost.

Acupressure

This is a practised, safe, and effective form of pain relief for women during labour. Acupressure involves applying pressure using fingers, knuckles, and thumbs on different parts of the body to encourage a flow of energy. Consult a registered practitioner for further advice.

Massage

Massage is a great way for a birthing partner to feel actively involved during labour and it has been shown to reduce feelings of anxiety and increase feelings of relaxation. Listen to her and be aware of her contractions. Some mums don't want to be touched during a contraction and others want massage techniques for comfort. Practice some massage techniques during pregnancy so you feel prepared.

Being present

The most important part of this role is to simply be there with her. Be present, encourage, reassure, and show her love in these challenging moments. Even just sitting in silence is enough sometimes.

Hydrotherapy

Access to warm water such as a bath or a birthing pool can be a great way for mum to move, relax and soothe any discomfort. Encourage her to kneel and lean forward with her head resting on the side of the pool to open up the pelvis.

Pain relief, natural and modern medicines (pros/cons)

As we talked about before, optimising your flow of hormones (relaxin, oxytocin and especially endorphins) will aid your natural pain relief throughout each stage of labour. However, it is important to be clued up on the different types of modern medicines that are available to you should you need the extra support.

Pethidine

Pethidine is administered by your midwife or doctor in the form of an injection into your thigh or bottom. Pethidine helps you to relax and reduce pain. It only lasts 2-4 hours so it is only recommended for certain stages of labour.

PROS

- Pethidine helps you to relax and reduce your pain for 2-4 hours.

CONS

- After having the injection, it will take 20 minutes to take effect.
- It can make you feel sick and forgetful.
- If taken too close to the time your baby is delivered, it can affect their breathing.
- It may affect your baby's first feed.

Gas and air (Entonox)

This is a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide gas. Whilst it doesn't take all the pain away, it will help you to feel more comfortable during contractions. You will administer this yourself through a mouthpiece, it's best to take slow, deep breaths just before a contraction starts to feel the benefit.

PROS

- You can administer this yourself and be in control of when you need it.
- Available in hospitals and for home births*.
- You can stay mobile whilst using gas and air.
- Pain relief takes seconds to kick in.
- There are no harmful side effects to you or your baby.

*Check with your midwife about available pain relief if you are planning to have a home birth.

CONS

- Gas and air can make you feel dizzy, nauseous, or unable to concentrate.
- It won't completely take all the pain away.

Epidural

An epidural is a local anaesthetic that numbs the nerve that signals pain from the birth canal to your brain. An anaesthetist will need to administer this for you, which involves a needle carrying a small tube into your back so that the medicine can pass through. Your baby's heart rate will be closely monitored along with your contractions so that the midwife can guide you through your labour, telling you when to push and ease off, as you won't be able to feel this happening.

PROS

- If placed correctly, you will not feel any pain.
- You can top up the epidural yourself through a machine (or your midwife will do this for you).
- Some hospitals offer a "mobile" epidural.

CONS

- Epidurals are not always effective in labour.
- Epidurals are not available for home births.
- It will take up to 15 minutes to set up and another 15 minutes to take effect. It may need adjusting if it isn't positioned correctly.
- Although rare, your blood pressure can drop.
- The second stage of labour can take longer as you cannot feel contractions.
- You won't be mobile straight after your baby is born (due to the local anaesthetic).
- You may have a catheter put in place to help you urinate.
- Your back can feel sore for a couple of days afterwards.



Remifentanil

Remifentanil can be administered by you and runs straight into a vein in your arm. Your midwife will attach a clip to your finger so she can measure your oxygen levels as it can sometimes affect the mother's breathing.

PROS

- This type of pain relief works quickly.
- You can use it up until your baby is born.

CONS

- The pain relief wears off within minutes.
- It can make you feel sick, drowsy, or itchy (this wears off when you stop using it).
- Similar to pethidine, it can affect your baby's breathing (this wears off quickly).

TENS machine

TENS machines can be bought online or hired through your hospital. It provides pain relief by taping electrodes to your back which are connected to the machine with wires. The current running through the electrodes will stimulate the body to produce more endorphins, the natural pain-relieving hormone! It can also reduce the number of pain signals sent from your spinal cord to your brain.

PROS

- Effective for early stages of labour.
- Suitable to use in the hospital and for home births.
- You can control the stimulations yourself.
- You can use the machine whilst moving around.
- There are no known side effects of using a TENS machine during labour for the mother or the baby

CONS

- Not as effective in later stages of labour when your contractions are longer and stronger.



Breathing techniques

As your body starts to enter the early stages of labour, you can use simple breathing strategies to help you remain calm and focused. Keeping calm is essential to avoid anything affecting the pattern of your breathing, such as hyperventilating or holding your breath. If this starts to happen, you may notice yourself starting to feel panicked or anxious which will affect your ability to progress through labour.

Practice with your birth partner beforehand by simply sighing at the beginning and end of each contraction. Some midwives refer to this as SOS which stands for 'Sigh Out Slowly'. You can maintain your breathing pattern by staying relaxed, using words or phrases with your breathing, and also listening to your breath.

As your labour progresses you will feel your body starting to "push" with your breathing. There may be times when you need to stop pushing and panting can help you with this. Your midwife can guide you through allowing your baby to be delivered slowly to avoid the risk of tearing.



✓ Top tips

- Greet a contraction with a sigh and end with a sigh.
- Breathe through the pain to remain relaxed so your endorphins can ease some of your pain.
- Your birth partner can breathe with you to help you keep the pattern of your breathing. This is also helpful for timing your contractions in the early stage of labour.

Positive affirmations

- My baby and I are working together.
- All of the strength I need is inside me.
- I breathe in my power. I exhale my fear.
- My body has created a miracle.
- I trust that my body and my baby know what to do.
- My body is designed to do this.
- Each wave brings me closer to my baby.
- I believe in my body.
- This pain will not last forever.
- I am strong, powerful, and in control.
- My birth partner is by my side, and on my side.
- I am surrounded by love.
- I am doing an amazing job.
- My surges aren't happening to me, they are a part of me.
- I quiet my mind and let my body give birth.
- My body will give birth at the exact right moment.
- My body is capable and strong.
- I accept this pain to welcome my baby into the world.
- I will birth my baby peacefully, naturally, and joyfully.
- Women all over the world are birthing with me.
- I CAN breathe through this contraction.
- I will meet my baby today.

Movement in labour

Movement during your labour can ease your pain and allow you to feel more comfortable and shift into different positions as your labour progresses. Some forms of pain relief may prevent you from moving around freely so this is something to consider when discussing options for pain relief, such as an epidural.

If you have a birth ball or a chair in the room with you, you can use these to support your body as you move into different positions. You can try:



- Kneeling on all fours
- Leaning over onto the bed (or against your birth partner)
- Sitting on a chair backwards or on the toilet
- Walking around slowly
- Rocking forwards and backwards on a birth ball

Some of these movements will ease any back pain you may feel and also gravity can do its part too to help bring your baby down the birth canal. Also, your birth partner will be able to massage or support you in different positions which gives your body a better chance of releasing more pain-relieving endorphins.

Hypnobirthing

Hypnobirthing is growing in popularity amongst expecting mothers as a way to manage their pain during labour and childbirth. It teaches you visualisation techniques, as well as breathing and relaxation strategies to support you through this journey.

There are lots of resources online that teach you about hypnobirthing methods. You can also search for classes local to you or rent/borrow resources from your local library to practice hypnobirthing techniques before labour. If you are seriously considering this for your birth plan, it would be beneficial for you and your birth partner to practice beforehand, so you feel prepared and confident from the start.



Visualisation

- In some cases, hypnobirthing has been shown to make labour shorter.
- Evidence has shown that practising hypnobirthing after birth lowers the chances of postnatal depression in mothers.
- Studies revealed hypnobirthing may lessen the chances of mothers needing intervention during labour and childbirth.

Mindfulness

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Facts about hyponobirthing

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Birth

Active birth

An active birth means that you move freely throughout your labour, and you can give birth in whatever position you choose. Essentially, you are not stuck on your back in a bed as they do in films! When you are comfortable, relaxed and in control, your hormones will naturally work more effectively to progress your labour and assist you as your baby is born.

Refer back to the 'Movement in Labour' section for some tips about different positions you can try.



Vaginal birth

A vaginal delivery is when you give birth to your baby through your vagina, which is the most common way women give birth. If you experience any complications during the birth, your midwife will intervene to assist the birth. This may involve using forceps or a ventouse (vacuum cup) to help you birth your baby.

In some circumstances, when the baby is becoming distressed and needs to be born quickly, your midwife may perform an episiotomy to help deliver your baby. It involves making a small cut in the area between your vagina and perineum to make the opening bigger.

Typically, vaginal delivery with little or no complications allows mothers to recover from childbirth quicker than those who needed interventions or a c-section delivery.



C-section – emergency, elected, gentle c-sections

A caesarean is an operation that surgeons perform to deliver your baby by making a small incision in your lower abdomen and uterus. This operation is performed in emergencies when mothers are experiencing a complicated delivery or mothers can choose to have a c-section in advance before their labour has begun. Discuss the option of an elected c-section with your midwife if you feel this route would be better suited to you and your circumstances.

Gentle c-sections are becoming increasingly popular because parents feel like they get a mixture of a c-section and vaginal birth experience. Traditionally, once the baby is born, they are handed to a paediatrician for checks before giving them to the parents to hold. With a gentle c-section, the baby is delivered more slowly and placed instantly onto mum for skin-to-skin contact. The baby may instigate their first feed from the breast and the umbilical cord clamping is delayed building a stronger connection for mother and baby outside of the womb. There is no difference to the actual surgery, it's the processes that follow which are more similar to vaginal birth.

VBAC – vaginal birth after c-section

If you have previously had c-sections, there is still a chance that you can have a vaginal delivery. This will be discussed with your midwife or doctor before labour as it will depend on how many c-sections you have had before and any complications you've experienced during pregnancy.

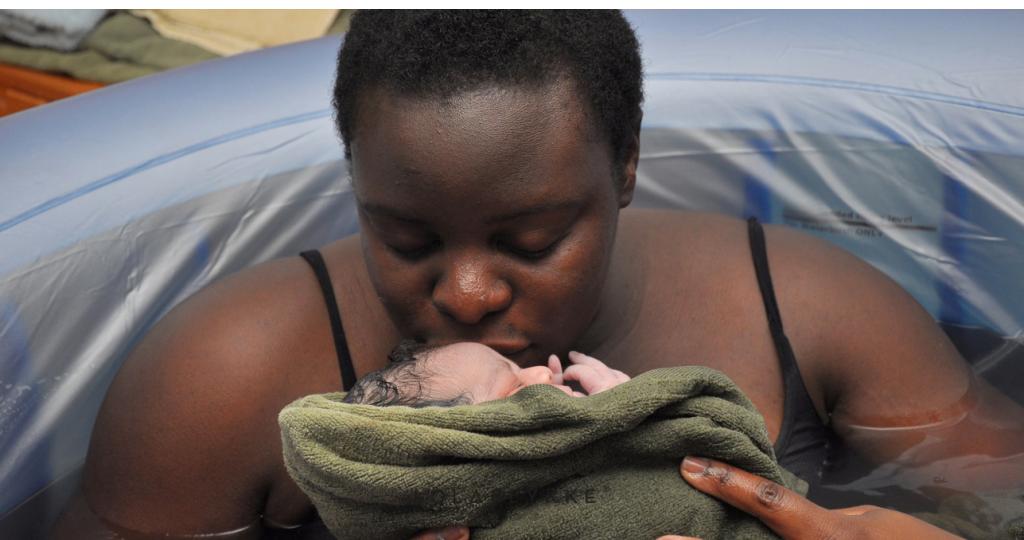
Your midwife or doctor will advise you to have another c-section if:

- You have experienced a uterine rupture in a previous birth.
- You have previously had womb surgery.
- You have a vertical scar on your uterus.
- You have placenta praevia (the neck of your uterus is blocked by the placenta).

Water birth

If you are considering a water birth, you will need to plan for this well in advance so that it is available to you when you go to have your baby. Expecting mums like water births because it helps them to relax during labour, it can act as a form of pain relief and also the buoyancy helps them to move into different positions throughout their labour. If your labour progresses smoothly, there is also the option to deliver your baby in the water.

Your midwife may ask you to get out of the water so they can examine you to check your progress or if they have any concerns about your or your baby's welfare.



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