

Setting up your birth pool

This is a guide to how to set up your birth pool at home for labour and birth. There is also a section about doing a dry run and a wet run.

Types of pool

Two types most common: Birth pool in a box, and La Bassine. Birth pool in a box has three separate horizontal inflatable layers. It also has a step to sit on. La Bassine has one inflatable section, though it looks like there are vertical sections. There are some La Bassine pools that have three horizontal rings. Both makes have inflatable bases. They both come in two sizes.

You can also buy a large paddling pool. These are adequate, but the plastic is not as robust, so there is a greater risk of leak. These pools are not as deep so not as comfortable to kneel and lean over. They are also not deep enough to cover your bottom if you are kneeling leaning forward over the edge, which would be a safety concern.

Hot tubs and jacuzzis are not recommended because they have heaters and filters which can harbour bacteria, such as Legionnaire's disease.

What you need

I recommend buying your supplies from www.homebirthsupplies.co.uk, but check with me first as I often have a spare liner and such.

- a. **Pool**
- b. **Liner***
- c. **Pump** to inflate pool ~£5-15
- d. **Pump** to empty water from pool (like one for a pond) ~£15-25
- e. **Plastic** to go under pool to protect floor/carpet from wet splashes.
- f. **Towels or sheets** or picnic blanket (to soak up splashes so plastic does not get slippery, and to stop the sound of rustling plastic.
- g. Two or three **towels** for you (in case of getting in and out of the pool) and three or four towels for the baby. Plus three or four hand towels to lean on, over the edge of the pool. (These gradually get wet, so need replacing. It is much nicer to lean on a towel than the plastic edge of the pool, especially in case you get a reaction from leaning on the plastic for a long time.)
- h. **Tap adapter** There are different types so check you have the right one. Ask me if you are not sure, or take picture of your tap to a hardware shop.
- i. **Hose***
- j. **Bucket** – For taking out water (when you need to take some out to add hot – but only if bucket is new and clean), for clearing the last bit of water from the pool, and for cleaning the water pump with after use.
- k. **Sieve***
- l. **Water thermometer***
- m. **Cover** (optional) A shower curtain or plastic sheet is sufficient, or you can purchase a cover. This helps to keep the heat in when you have filled the pool, or half filled it, till you are ready.
- n. **Waterproof mirror** (most of the time the midwife will bring this, but this may vary from area to area). This is so she can see what is happening underneath without putting her head in the water and wearing goggles!)
- o. **Extra kettle** This is not essential but jolly useful if you run out of hot water.
- p. **Sterilizing tablets or liquid**
- q. **Straw** It is easier to drink from a straw when you are in the pool. I have some metal ones.

*Must be bought new. Ideally tap adapters should be new too. The thermometer and the mirror do not have to be new but if used for a previous water birth, then should be cleaned thoroughly with a sterilising solution before use.

Alternatives:

A liner helps to protect your baby from any potential bacteria from a previous use, or from the pool not being put away fully dry, and it protects future users. It also helps with clearing away, making the job much easier and quicker. If you don't use a liner then it is recommended that you clean the pool, before and after use, with a sterilising liquid/solution, such as Milton (tablet or liquid). Do not use bleach or household cleaners.

Instead of a pump to empty the pool you could siphon the water out. (Search online for instructions.)

If you can't find the right tap adapter you can cut a hole in the side of a large plastic bottle, near to the base (e.g. 2l fizzy drink bottle). Screw the hose onto the bottle top. Put the bottle over the tap, upside down.

Another alternative is to siphon the water into the pool. Put a clean bowl or bucket in the sink. Put one end of the hose in the pool. Turn the tap on, so it fills up the bowl, and leave it on. Hold the hose under the tap so it starts to flow through the hose. When the water is flowing into the pool put your thumb over the end of the hose to seal it, and then put that end into the bowl, under the water. Keep it under the water. You may need to tape the hose in place.

Where

It doesn't matter if it is ground floor or above, unless you live in a very old house. The weight of the water is about the weight of 8-13 adults. If the floor could bear their weight, when standing very close, then it will be fine.

If you live in a very old house and want to have the pool on the first floor then you might want to get an appropriate trained person to check.

You do not need to ask your landlord's permission. You do not need to inform your insurance company.

You can get a really long hose so it doesn't matter too much about being near a tap. I was at a home birth on the ground floor and they used the kitchen tap which was on the first floor.

The waste water can go into the garden, down a drain, down the shower/bath plug hole, or down the toilet. Just make sure the hose is long enough to get to one of those.

You want to be warm, especially in the winter, and feel private. If you have windows with no curtains you can tack or tape up a sheet, or use a portable blackout blind. (I have one I can lend.)

Midwives like to be able to get all the way around the pool, so they can see what is happening whichever way you are facing, and in case they need to help the baby.

Some women get it all set up in one room, each a dining room, and leave it all set up. Most people just put it up on the day. The pool takes only 5 minutes to inflate. I've timed it.

What to wear

You can go naked. You can wear a tight fitting vest top, or bikini top. T-shirts just float and the wetness on your shoulders can make you cold. On your bottom half, you could have nothing at all, or wear bikini bottoms, or swimming cossie rolled down.

Partners can get in the pool too. Obviously with swimming trunks on.

Set up (15 mins)

- i) If the pool has been outside, especially if it is cold, bring it in to the house for at least 24-48 hours (72hours plus in winter). Cold plastic can be brittle and this can lead to cracks and leaks.
- ii) Make sure the area is totally clear. No toys or bits that could damage the pool or be uncomfortable if you are kneeling on them for several hours. Sweep or Hoover if necessary.
- iii) If you have laminate or hard flooring you might like to put a rug or duvet down first.
- iv) Put down plastic covering. Put down sheets or towels. Can be just around the edges of the pool.
- v) Lay the pool out, and inflate. The value has two layers. You take them both off to deflate, but screw the lower one on to inflate, as it is a one way valve. If it has horizontal rings, inflate the lower ring first.
- vi) If you are shorter than average you can adjust the height of the pool by leaving the middle ring less inflated. Leave the top ring slightly under inflated to make it easier to put the liner on, then inflate fully. Always have the top ring fully inflated, to give a firm surface for leaning on and to help with getting in and out.
- vii) Add the liner**, lining up the seat and handles, if present.
- viii) Fill the pool (see sections below).
- ix) Put hand towel over side to lean on.

Dry run

A dry run is when you set up the pool, without adding any water, to check you know what you are doing and that it doesn't have any punctures. You can try the liner putting the liner on, but don't get in or if you do, be careful not to damage the liner (so no toys!) The liner is not sterile. It doesn't need to be. Just clean.

Doing a dry run is a good idea. You can try out where it will fit, and check the hose is long enough (without attaching the hose).

You can also get in and try out different positions. It also helps your subconscious to relax in labour if you have already been in the pool. (Adrenaline is triggered by novelty.)

You can leave it up for a couple of hours to see if it deflates anywhere. There is a repair kit with the pool. Do contact me if there is a problem. Small tears can be mended with a bicycle puncture repair kit if there is no time to get replacement repair kit.

The most common area to deflate is the base. This isn't the end of the world. You can place a duvet under the pool (under the waterproof sheet), or even put a pillow into a vacuum storage bag, to have in the pool.

Make sure when you pack it away that it is clean, dry, and free of bits, especially anything sharp, like a toy or small stick. I know it sounds obvious, but it is important.

To pack away quickly you can move the hose on the air pump on to the outlet bit in the middle of the pump and then it will pump air out of the pool. Fold in three long ways (fold long sides in) and then roll.

Wet run

A wet run is useful if you want to check out how long it takes to full, and how your hot water system will cope. Alternatively, time filling a bath. A regular BPIAB is equivalent to 4 baths, and a mini is 2.5 baths, approximately. Though on the day you don't need to fill it all up in one go.

You can also do a wet run if you just want to get in the pool and relax. It can be lovely to help with late pregnancy aches and pains. You have paid for the hire; you might as well enjoy the benefits.

You do not need to use a liner to do the wet run, but the warranty against leaks is not valid if you don't use one. A liner keeps the pool dry which reduces the chance of going mouldy, or harbouring infection. Another reason to use a liner for a wet run, is that it could tip you in to labour. It did for me!

If you decide to use a liner for the wet run, you would need to use a new liner for the birth (unless you go into labour).

You could, in theory, reuse the liner IF you wiped it with sterilizing solution, and left it to air dry completely. The risk is in germs breeding on dampness or stagnant water (however tiny). I don't advise this. You do so at your own risk.

Filling the pool (see below).

Packing away:

- Take hose off the tap and leave in the sink (you may need to curl it around, or weigh it down).
- Put open end of hose on water pump, and put pump in the pool.
- Empty the water down the sink as it is clean. You want to keep the hose end clean for filling the pool on B-day, so **don't** put it down the loo or drain.
- When the water level is down to the last ring (or about 10-15cm) put some sterilizing tablets or liquid into the water. This will flush the pipe and the pump.
- With a cloth, wipe the sterilizing solution all over the sides of the pool.
- When the pump can't do any more, use clean buckets/bowls to scoop out the rest of the water.
- Towel dry with clean towels. Leave out to air dry completely for several hours.
- Leave the pump out to dry.
- Deflate the pool by unscrewing the outer valves.
- To deflate quickly you can move the hose on the air pump on to the outlet bit in the middle of the pump and then it will pump air out of the pool.
- Make sure when you pack it away that it is clean, dry, and free of bits, especially anything sharp, like a toy or small stick. I know it sounds obvious, but it is important.
- Fold in three long ways (fold long sides in) and then roll.

Filling the pool

- Check area is clear. Place waterproof sheet or equivalent down. Unpack pool, and inflate. Make sure valve for the base and valve for the seat is closed. Make sure pool is where you want it.
- Uncoil the hose.
- Place one part of the tap adapter on to one end of the hose. Put the other on the tap, tightly. Don't turn on yet!
- Put the other end in the sink and turn the tap on for a minute to flush the hose through.
- The water shouldn't be spraying from the tap adapter. You may need to adjust or tighten the adapter. If there is still a small amount of spray place a small towel over the tap to stop it spraying everywhere.
- Turn off the tap. Carefully move the open end to the pool. If using a liner, there is a little place in the liner to feed the hose through which will help it stay in place.
- Fill the pool about five inches and wait a while, to check for any leaks. (Unless using a liner.)
- Fill the pool to just over the second ring. Do not fill to the max level as you need to leave room to add more hot water, and the water level will go up when people get in the pool. (See next section.)
- Leave the open end of the hose in the pool. (If you take it out you can't leave it on the floor as the water in the hose will go on your floor. In the pool it is safe, and it keeps it clean.)
- If you fill up the pool too early, or labour stalls, you can leave the water in for 24 hours before replacing.

Hot/cold

Put in hot first, up to the first ring, in early labour, when you know this is definitely labour. Add the remainder of the water when you are getting close to wanting to get in. Don't fill to the max. Leave room to add hot to top up. It will take at least 30 mins to fill the pool.

You can have a tap connector on each tap or swap them over. It is quick.

Outside

Please do not take the pool outside for a dry or wet run, no matter how nice the weather! It is at increased risk of puncture and getting dirty.

If you would you would like to give birth outside, in the pool. Please contact me about this. Or even better, purchase your own pool.

Prep

Things to do before B-day. You may have done these things if you did a dry/wet run.

- If it is cold/winter, have the pool in the house.
- Check the tap adapter fits. Put it on the tap and turn the tap on.
- Attach one part of the tap adapter to the hose.
- Make sure your partner/other birth partner/doula knows where everything is.
- If you want to check how long it will take to fill the pool. Time how long it takes to fill a bath. A regular pool will take 4 times that long, and a mini pool will take 2.5 times.

On the day

- a. Turn on the hot water, if applicable.
- b. When you are sure that this is it, set up and inflate the pool, as above.

- c. Leave the top ring slightly under inflated.
- d. Put the liner on. Fully inflate the top ring.
- e. Flush the hose into the sink.
- f. If you have constant hot water/combi boiler you can just leave everything until nearer the time to get in the pool, or fill to second ring (two thirds). (Allowing time to fill. You can always do it early but leave space to add more hot water.)
- g. If you have a hot water tank/not a combi, then fill with hot up to first ring or more. Then you can add cold later.
- h. Cover the pool with cover or plastic sheet to help temperature.
- i. Close windows and keep door closed. This helps room reach 'peak humidity', which results in less temperature loss.
- j. When checking temperature hold thermometer in the water, not on surface, and move it around in the water. Rule of thumb is: external body temperature for labour, internal body temperature for birth. It should be no more than 37 degrees in labour. 35-37 degrees is about right. But say if you are feeling too hot or too cold. You can overheat if it is too warm, and that has an effect on the baby. Just before the baby is born increase the temperature to about 37-37.5 degrees. Women often know exactly what is right, and when it needs heating up.
- k. Put hand towel on side of pool to lean on.

When to get in

It is entirely up to you when to get in. Water can be soothing in early labour. Midwives often recommend a bath to help with early labour and a birth pool is the same.

Your midwife may say to wait until they are there before getting in the pool, but it is your choice. There are two reasons they suggest waiting.

- a. Being in the pool for more than two hours can cause the surges/contractions/waves of power to lessen, especially in early labour, but that's okay. You get out, walk about, go to the loo, and then get back in. Each time you get back in the pool you will get a wave of oxytocin.
- b. Due to this wave of oxytocin, getting in the pool could make your labour speed up, and so they would rather be there. But it is your choice.

Topping up with hot water

You may need to top up to get to the right temperature. Keep hot water away from any people in the pool. It is a good idea if the partner is in, for them to get out. The guidelines from Birth Pool in a Box suggests that everyone should get out of the pool, but in all the water births I have been at the hot water has been added away from the woman and the water swirled around to mix it up.

If you have run out of hot water from the tap, you can use kettles, and saucepans to heat up water.

If you need to empty some of the water to add more hot, then use very clean bucket/bowl, or large saucepans to scoop the water out.

Emptying the pool

- 1) Take the hose off the tap
- 2) Put the open end of the hose, that has been in the pool, onto the water pump.
- 3) Put the water pump in the pool upright.

- 4) Remove the adapter bit from the other end of the hose, and place that end down the toilet (lift the seat to put it down, and then replace to hold in place), or down drain or into shower cubicle/bath.
- 5) When the pump is almost finished, lift the liner to make the water deeper on one side.
- 6) Use bucket/bowl to empty out as much of the remainder as possible, if necessary.
- 7) Rinse and fill the bucket with clean water. Put pump in and turn it on to pump through with clean water.
- 8) Refill the bucket and add sterilising liquid/tablet. Turn pump on again. Put pump to the side to dry (it may drip).
- 9) Lift liner, with any remaining water and bits, and dispose of in the household bin.
- 10) Bin the sieve and the thermometer, in the liner.
- 11) You can bin the hose, or keep for the garden.

Packing away

- i) Wipe down the pool (and cover if used) with a damp cloth soaked in sterilizing solution, including the outside sides.
- ii) Leave to air dry.
- iii) Deflate only when completely dry.
- iv) Do not pack the pool away damp, please!
- v) Fold in thirds, bringing long sides in. Roll up.

Using the pool for a 're-birthing'

Sometimes birth doesn't work out as planned and you may not get to use the pool in labour, or you may have used in labour, but not for the birth. In these situations you might like to get have a 're-birthing' bath in the pool. This can help with feelings of disappointment or trauma from the birth, it can help with bonding, and it can help the baby trigger the newborn feeding reflexes, which sometimes sorts out feeding issues. I have written about it in [this article](#), reprinted below.

What is rebirthing?

Rebirthing is a special bath you take with your baby to recreate the moment of birth. This is often done after a difficult or traumatic birth, or even a birth that just didn't go as planned. Perhaps you planned a water birth and ended up with a caesarean; a home birth that ended up in hospital; had a rushed birth; or your baby was whisked away and you didn't have that time of meeting your baby, of skin to skin. Midwives and doulas call that moment the 'birth pause', when the baby is born and the mother takes a breath to recover and then looks at her baby. (Women don't always pick their babies up immediately.)

It is normal to grieve for the birth that you had planned but didn't happen; to feel sad if your baby's first moments on this earth weren't as calm and close as you had imagined. Rebirthing gives you a chance to replay this moment, to have some healing.

Rebirthing started out as a way to help breastfeeding as it can be useful if breastfeeding isn't going well. Bathing with your baby triggers the newborn reflexes. This can really help a baby who is having difficulty latching. Babies having a rebirthing bath are known to do the 'breast crawl', and move themselves over to the breast and latch on. Rebirthing in this way is often recommended by breastfeeding counsellors and health professionals, especially if the baby didn't get skin to skin at birth or if baby doesn't seem interested in latching.

What happens?

Rebirthing can be done in your bath or in a birth pool. If you have a birth pool that you didn't get to use then you can use that for the rebirthing. You could have soft lighting, calm music, candles and aromatherapy of your choosing.

Rebirthing can be done just with you and your partner, or with a doula. I offer it as an extension of my doula practice. Or you may like to have your mum or sister help out. It can start with massage of your hands, feet, face and then read a relaxation script. If you did hypno birthing you can use one of those scripts, read by your partner or on MP3. Your partner can rub/stroke your back, or just hold you, or your baby. When you are ready you would get in the water. Your partner or doula could pour water on your back/shoulders and read another relaxation script. (I have some specially prepared for this.) There would be an emphasis of acceptance of the birth that happened, of grieving for the birth that didn't happen.

When you are ready your partner would place the baby in the water between your legs, holding it their head out of the water. You would reach over and take your baby and greet it. Sitting back with your baby on your chest. You would stay there for a while, enjoying the skin to skin, splashing water on the baby's back. You can watch and wait for the breast crawl if you like, or feed your baby, breast or bottle.

After the rebirthing you and your baby and partner would get tucked up in bed with some yummy treats. It is recommended that you stay in bed for the rest of the day, skin to skin, enjoying your baby. Rebirthing can be emotional and tiring.