

*About five a month*

## UCH'S "WATER BIRTHS" MAY REDUCE PAIN, PRODUCE CALMER BABIES

University of Colorado Hospital often makes its name by providing cutting-edge research and state-of-the-art treatment available nowhere else in the state and region. But another service that differentiates it from other hospitals is about as low-tech as you can get.

It's water birth: a method of delivery that allows mothers to immerse themselves and relax in warm water up to and through the time of delivery. It requires only a room, a large tub and support from a certified nurse-midwife (CNM). At UCH – the only hospital in the metro area that offers the service – that's provided by a CNM at the Center for Midwifery.

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*Certified nurse midwife Jessica Anderson cares for patient who chose water birth at UCH.*

"[Water birth] is one option for clients who come to our practice," says Jessica Anderson, MSN, CNM, clinical instructor at the center, which offers a wide range of prenatal, postnatal and other birthing services. Most women with low-risk pregnancies, she adds, are candidates for water birth, which typically account for five of the 30 deliveries each month at the center.

**Unexpected benefits.** "Water birth is a choice for women who don't want to use pain medications," she notes. "It takes place in a safe, protected environment, and water offers instant relaxation during labor." Some research, she says, shows water decreases labor pain, encourages dilation and reduces tearing of the perineum during birth.

Water birth babies appear calmer, Anderson says. "They go from water [in the womb] into water," she says. "The midwife guides the infant out of the water to the

mother's chest; the father or someone else cuts the umbilical cord in the tub." She says water birth infants don't cry until they are out of the tub water. The mother gets out of the tub for safe delivery of the placenta.

There is no set procedure for a water birth, Anderson emphasizes. Women may get in and out of the tub, shower, walk, or sit on a birthing ball to help induce labor, and can get an epidural or intravenous pain medication to help manage pain if they choose. The midwife monitors the baby's well-being by listening to the heart beat at regular intervals.

"Some use the water to go through labor but don't deliver in the tub," she adds. "Our philosophy is that we are a partner in care with our client. We want to provide an experience that is safe and empowering."

Not every woman is an appropriate candidate for water birth, Anderson stresses. "We won't proceed with the water birth if they present during labor with problems like high blood pressure or if the baby is not tolerating labor. We assess the patient prenatally and during labor to make sure that water birth is a safe option."

Insurance companies don't distinguish between traditional and water births, Anderson adds. The only additional cost incurred is for rental of a special water birth pool, available at the Center for Midwifery.

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