

Why Babies Don't Drown During Waterbirth...

By Anne Clarke, Midwife, Brisbane.

A baby's lung is filled with lung fluid, an acidic fluid. There is a 'no zone' if you like between the acidic lung fluid and the saline amniotic fluid at the level of the pharynx. The pharynx has the most 'taste buds' even compared with the tongue, this allows a 'one way' system to occur. While in utero the lung fluid will spill over into the amniotic fluid and the baby will swallow, however, under no circumstances does amniotic fluid go into the lungs as the pharynx 'tastes' any fluid and closes if any other fluid is detected. This reflex is fantastic as this is one of the reasons babies don't drown during a water birth because if any fluid is detected that is not lung fluid the baby will swallow instead - brilliant!

Lung fluid is NOT fully expelled during birth. As the baby's lungs are not inflated it is essential that when the baby takes its first breath, this action forces the lung fluid into the blood vessels and is one of the primary mechanisms that helps inflates the lungs as the fluid enters the blood vessels that supply blood into the lungs and swells the vessels allowing more blood flow to assist in the oxygenation of blood in the initial few hours after birth. This is why when babies have 'wet lungs' causing Transient Tachypnea of the Newborn (TTN) it is due to the malabsorption of this lung fluid and is rarely caused by any other reason unless prematurity, congenital malformation or infection is present inhibiting the process. Well term babies will usually absorb this fluid within a few hours.

We know that the 'breathing' exercises that babies do in utero slow down and cease just prior to labour and during labour signaling babies to start absorbing that lung fluid. This is one of the reasons to argue for mothers to experience some labour prior to a caesarean and why cold section babies are more prone to retaining lung fluid as there has been no signal to the baby that 'you are going to be born start preparing please'!

One could also argue therefore that whether a baby is born by caesarean or vaginally it is the pre and labour experienced is more significant than the chest compression that occurs during a vaginal birth that allows the lung fluid to be absorbed. The fluid that you sometimes see oozing from a baby's nose and mouth is amniotic fluid in the mouth and nose and nothing to do with lung fluid. This is backed up by the fact with testing the alkalinity of this fluid.

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