

# Lotus Birth - not just a pretty flower!

Throughout the last couple of decades, western medicine has faced an increase in a variety of natural methods and labour and birth haven't been left out of these notions. Lotus birth has gained a lot of attention lately, as more and more are choosing to abandon the common practice of severing the umbilical cord soon after birth. Lotus birth is often endorsed as being more 'natural' and more 'peaceful' for both Mumma and baby, but, this birthing practice/placenta ritual isn't without its share of controversy or risk. Let's shed light on this trend.

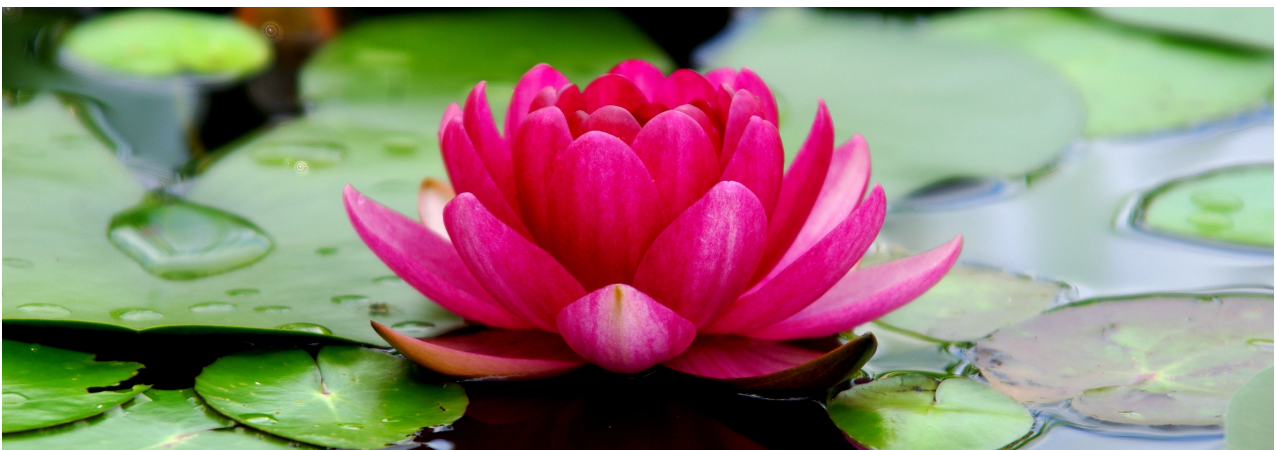
## Firstly, what is a lotus birth?

Lotus birth, also called umbilical non-severance, is when the umbilical cord is left completely intact, still connecting your baby to the placenta, until the cord naturally separates from the belly button. This typically takes up to 10 days.

While some people cite the lotus flower and its symbolism of unity and rebirth for the name of this practice, lotus birth is a relatively new ritual, and actually comes from events in 1974. Having only been described in chimpanzees before 1974 when Clair Lotus Day, pregnant and living in California, began to question the routine cutting of the umbilical cord and wondered why humans don't leave the cord intact too. Her searching led her to an obstetrician who was understanding to her wishes and her son Trimurti was born in a hospital and taken home with the cord intact until it naturally separated. Clair observed her son seemed more content than if he had experienced detachment from his placenta before it was ready to separate from him. Other birth advocates learned about it, and the practice spread.

Since 1974, many babies have been born this way, including babies born at home and in hospital, on land and in water, and even by caesarean section.

Although events in 1974 allowed this practice to become more widely known, traces of lotus birth have been found in the historical records - it is rooted in ancient medicinal practices of Asian and African civilizations. In the era before the reliable maternity care that exists today, people sometimes left the placenta connected with the baby to prevent infections from having an open wound. As one can imagine, the people of ancient societies couldn't provide sterile surroundings for a newborn, nor vaccination to protect him from the disease. In some cases, they'd choose to leave the umbilical cord non-severed so that the baby wouldn't have an open wound on his body. As medicine progressed, this practice was abandoned.



## Are there medical benefits of lotus births?

The majority of claims of lotus birth benefits relate to the metaphysical concept of preserving the wholeness of the baby at birth. However, it is better to stick with evidence-based medicine.

Here are a couple of lotus birth benefits:

- It is believed that the benefits of lotus birth are also psychological. It leaves a completely safe, balanced environment in which their needs are always met, to come into the world that consists of light, noises, temperature changes etc and where your baby experiences the sensation of hunger for the first time. Lotus birth is said to ease the transition for your baby, as it remains attached to its umbilical cord, with which they spent months touching and playing.
- Other alleged benefits include better blood circulation for the baby as it receives the remaining blood from the umbilical cord. There are also benefits from absorbing the stem cells that are found inside the cord - although this can be achieved with delayed cord clamping too.
- Promotes a time of rest, allowing new parents and their baby to adjust
- Mother and baby stay together, enhancing the bonding process
- Babies are less likely to be disturbed by being "passed around" to too many visitors
- Babies are observed by their parents to be calmer and more peaceful than those who have their cords cut immediately after birth
- The process and practice honour the connection the baby has had with the placenta that has nourished her for nine months and values the transition stage between the uterus and the world

## Risks associated with a lotus birth:

- Infection - primarily, it is a risk from infection as the umbilical cord and the placenta essentially become dead tissue after birth, they begin to deteriorate soon after labour
- Injury to the navel (belly button) is another potential risk from lotus birth. While the baby is attached to the placenta, they need to be treated extremely tenderly. Mothers are instructed to pick up and move around the baby only when necessary so that the umbilical cord doesn't tear or get irritated.
- Sepsis is a constant threat. If not closely monitored, a baby with an unsevered umbilical cord can become septic very easily. Sepsis is otherwise one of the major health risks for a newborn, as an infection can overtake the newborn's defenceless body within hours.

## How to take care of the placenta?

With lotus birth, placenta care is extremely important to reduce the risk of infections. Here's what you need to do to care for the placenta after lotus birth:

- Rinse it with water and wrap it into a clean, absorbent fabric
- Wash it daily with fresh water to remove bacteria
- Keep it wrapped up and store it in a bowl or a pot
- Cover it in sea salt and herbs to cover the smell and speed up the drying process

While attached to the umbilical cord, your baby needs loose clothing that prevents squeezing and tugging of the umbilical cord. Caution is advised when feeding and carrying your baby. In most cases, the 'lotus babies' and their mothers are practically confined to your bed, as the tender umbilical cord and the placenta require space and reduce mobility. However, this doesn't last for long as the placenta will detach itself in around 10 days.

If you are concerned about infection, especially in your baby's cord, or the well-being of yourself or your baby, please see your health professional immediately.

## Does the placenta smell?

The placenta can develop a musky smell after a few days but most parents say it is not offensive or overpowering. If the placenta is wrapped in plastic or sealed in a plastic container, it will begin to decay and develop a strong rotten smell. Ensuring the placenta air circulating around it will help it to dry properly and avoid it spoiling.

## Final considerations:

A lotus birth reduces mobility for the mother, it promotes slow and purposeful healing. Many women feel an urge to be active after giving birth, which doesn't go hand in hand with postnatal healing. For a mother to recover properly after giving birth, rest is vital!

Although there are substantial claims of the health benefits of the lotus birth for the baby, there's no record of actual benefits obtained through scientific research and there are no experimental studies. Delayed severance, on the other hand, had been confirmed to be beneficial for the baby's health (delayed cord clamping). With this practice, the umbilical cord is left attached for an hour after giving birth. This process is perhaps a good alternative to lotus, as it's generally risk-free.

Some parents who choose lotus birth do so for religious or spiritual reasons. Lotus birth is believed to preserve the wholesomeness of the baby as being. Severing the umbilical cord is, in many cultures, believed to be a very aggressive act that disrupts the energy flow inside the baby's body. If the placenta is left with the baby, it will detach naturally and give the baby more time to adapt to this world. Still, there's very little scientific evidence to support these claims.

