



# Having a baby

## Caesarean section



**A caesarean section is an operation where a doctor makes a cut in your abdomen (above your bikini line) and womb and lifts your baby out through it.**

### What can I expect?

Once in hospital you will have your observations taken, fill out some paperwork and change into a hospital gown. The operating theatre staff will call when the theatre is ready. Before going into surgery, you will be given an antacid medication (usually a small amount of clear fluid – sodium citrate). Why??

As there is not a lot of space we ask that you only have your partner or one support person with you while you wait.

### The anaesthetic

In the Operating Theatre, you will have an intravenous drip put into your arm before the operation. The anaesthetist will either:

- Insert the epidural/spinal catheter so you can be awake; or
- Put you to sleep for the operation (general anaesthetic).

Should you need general anaesthetic, your support person will need to wait outside of the operating theatre.

### The birth

The doctor starts the operation once you are ready. If you are awake for the birth, you may feel some pressure or pulling as the team is getting ready to birth your baby. When your baby is born, they will be dried off and brought to you.

Your baby will have skin-to-skin contact with you and first feed either in the Operating Theatre, Recovery Unit or Postnatal Ward. Some babies may need help with breathing at first, so skin-to-skin contact may be delayed.

The placenta is then delivered and the doctor will finish the operation. This process usually takes longer than the birth. The whole operation usually takes about 45 minutes.

The anaesthetist may give you a small amount of sedation after the baby is born if you are awake. This will make you relax and feel drowsy but not put you to sleep. You will then go to the Recovery Unit for a short period before being moved to the Postnatal Ward with your baby. If you are separated from your baby, your partner or support person will remain with the baby at this time.

### The baby

Your baby will be weighed, measured and examined in the Birth Unit, Recovery or the Postnatal Ward. Vitamin K and hepatitis B injections will also be given to the baby at this time.

Your partner or support person will be actively involved in the general care of the baby. By the second or third day you will be more independent and will need less help.

## Pain relief

It is important that you are aware of and use the pain relief available to you. The medications used have been assessed to make sure they are safe for you and your baby.

There are several ways to control pain after the operation. The choice may depend on the anaesthetist, the anaesthetic given and any allergies, etc.

A spinal injection of morphine may be given in the Operating Theatre. This will give you strong pain relief for the first 24 hours. Further pain relief will be given as needed.

Some women will have a drip which is run through a machine that allows you to control your own pain relief (PCA). This is usually in place for about 12-24 hours and is usually removed the next day.

## Observations

You will have observations taken regularly for the first 24 hours and receive oxygen via an oxygen mask or nasal prongs for up to 24 hours.

## The wound

Your wound will have a dressing left on for the first day or two. The dressing is usually removed by the third day.

Your wound will need to be kept clean and dry. You can get your wound wet during your shower, just make sure you dry it thoroughly afterwards. Some women will need to lift their abdomen to air the wound to help with drying.

Sometimes an iodine solution may be applied to help prevent infection. A drain may also be left in the wound to help drain the blood away to help with healing. This is generally removed within 24-48 hours.

## Recovery

If you have no other health problems, you will be helped to get up and walk around within a few hours of the operation, it will not harm your wound. You will have a catheter (tube) to drain your bladder for at least 12 hours. Walking is good for recovery and will help you avoid problems after your surgery, it can also lessen the pain you may have. Holding and caring for your baby does not harm the healing process and helps you get to know your baby.

## Food and rest

Good nutrition and drinking water, along with plenty of rest will help you recover from surgery. As your baby will need feeding and settling during the night we suggest that you take regular rest periods during the day.

## Going home

You will usually be discharged two to three days after the birth of your baby. Some women recover more quickly than others and choose to go home sooner. The Midwifery@Home service will visit you at home to provide further support and education if you choose this option.

## Normal activities

It will take time for you to return to normal activities. We suggest that you:

- Do not lift anything heavy apart from your baby for six weeks.
- Return to your normal routine when you feel able.
- Do not drive until you are free from pain after any sudden movement.

After 3-4 weeks, some women will experience new wound pain as the nerves that were cut heal. This pain lasts about a week or so. If you are worried, talk to your local doctor.



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