



Caesarean Birth

Caesarean birth is a surgical form of delivery. The mother is given a general or local anesthesia and the baby is removed through an incision in her lower abdomen. This procedure got its name from the Roman emperor Caesar, who was believed to be the first baby delivered this way. There are many reasons for performing a Caesarean:

- the baby doesn't fit through the mother's pelvis
- the cervix doesn't open enough for the mother to push the baby out
- the baby is in distress and must be delivered quickly
- the baby is not head-first
- the mother suffers life-threatening complications such as toxemia or diabetes
- the mother has an active case of herpes
- the placenta is between the baby's head and the birth canal (placenta previa)
- the mother has had a previous Caesarean delivery, although this is no longer necessary in every case.

Anesthesia

- Most often a Caesarean is performed after you've been given an epidural—or spinal—to numb you from the waist down. This has few side effects and allows you to see the delivery.
- If you're put under a general anesthesia, you may not wake up for several hours and feel groggy.
- Once anesthesia is given, an IV is placed in a vein for administering medication and fluids, and a catheter is placed in the urethra to control bladder function.

The Incision

Two types of incisions are used, the classical (vertical) or transverse (horizontal) cuts. Transverse is used most often because there's less blood lost, the incision tends to heal stronger and the scar is less noticeable, being just below the bikini line. A vertical cut is sometimes needed during emergency deliveries such as in placenta previa, where the placenta overlaps the cervix.

Recovery

As common a procedure as a Caesarean is, it's still surgery with risks involved. You'll need special recovery time and space.

- After 24 hours, your IV and urinary catheter will be taken out.
- You'll probably have gas pains the first few days as your intestines begin to function again after surgery.
- As soon as six hours after surgery you can begin to walk around. The sooner you can get upright, the faster you'll heal.
- Your stay in the hospital will be three to five days instead of one or two as in vaginal delivery.
- Babies born by Caesarean may be groggy and are closely monitored by a pediatrician. It may be six to 12 hours before your baby appears more alert.
- If you're going to breast-feed, try as soon as you feel well enough.
- You'll need lots of help once you get home. Accept help wherever you can get it: from paid help, your partner, your family, your neighbors and friends.
- For the first few weeks, it may be painful to pick up your baby, and it will take a while to get your strength back. You should avoid lifting anything heavy.
- It takes about six to eight weeks for your incision to heal.
- You'll have the same vaginal discharge as you would if you gave birth vaginally. The first week or so it will be bright red, then pink, then yellow-white. This may last up to six weeks.
- Emotionally, some women feel cheated because the labor ended in a Caesarean.

When to See Your Doctor

Excess bleeding could be a sign the uterus is not shrinking properly or that a piece of the placenta was left inside. If you're changing a sanitary pad every hour, call your doctor. If you're bleeding more heavily than one pad an hour, go to the emergency room.