

Planning and Recovering from a Cesarean

It's not always possible to have a vaginal delivery. A cesarean delivery presents unique postpartum challenges. However, remember this is temporary and you will heal completely. In fact, Dr. Mascorro had 3 c-sections and can certainly empathize with how you are feeling!

While a cesarean is not the preferred route for delivery for most moms, it can be life saving for a mother or her baby and also reduce risk of other complications that may occur if the baby delivered vaginally. A C-section is the delivery of a baby through a surgical opening in the abdomen typically along the bikini line. It is usually done when the mom is awake under spinal anesthesia which numbs only the lower half of the body for only a couple of hours. The surgery usually lasts on average 30-60 minutes.

A mom may need a cesarean in certain conditions - if the baby has fetal compromise in the womb with an abnormal heart rate, persistent abnormal fetal position like breech presentation, multiple pregnancies like triplets, if she has had a cesarean section previously, to name a few. Sometimes, a baby will not fit through the birth canal after a long trial of labor. Having a cesarean overall is very low risk. However, it is not risk free and there is a small risk for bleeding, infection or damage to internal organs during surgery. Additionally, future pregnancies and/or deliveries may be more complicated due to abnormal scar tissue in or outside of the uterus that can form after surgery.

Cesarean at Hendrick

At Hendrick for an uncomplicated cesarean, we try to make it as baby/mom friendly as possible.

Planning

The week prior to your C-section, we will provide you with personalized instructions and an antibacterial wash to use the night before and the morning of surgery on your thighs, groin, vagina and abdomen. If we forget or you miss this appointment, you may purchase this cleanser, HIBICLENS, from Walgreens, CVS or Amazon.

The week before your surgery get necessary supplies to make recovery easier and limit visits to the store. We recommend stocking up on large sanitary pads, disposable panties, ibuprofen and Tylenol, Aquaphor or Vaseline, Colace, Miralax, and possibly an abdominal binder. We would also recommend you stock up on diapers and formula if you are choosing to formula feed. You will need loose, comfortable panties after your surgery that will not rub on your cesarean scar for comfort. You will also need comfortable, loose pajama pants and sweat pants to wear while you recover.

The night before, it is very important you stop eating or drinking after midnight.

Surgery Day

For a routine, scheduled, planned cesarean, you will arrive 2 hours prior to surgery to Labor & Delivery. You may drink a white/clear 8-16 ounces of Gatorade (G2 if you are diabetic) between 2-3 hours before your scheduled cesarean time which may help with recovery. However, make sure you stop drinking except for this one gatorade after midnight and this gatorade must be completed 2 hours prior to your scheduled time.

If you are taking medications, hold those the morning of your surgery except your blood pressure medications which you should take with a small sip of water.

You will sign consents, have labs drawn and an IV placed, and meet with an anesthesiologist when you arrive. If you have any anesthesia concerns please discuss them with the anesthesiologist at this time.

Once we are ready, you will walk back to the operating room with your partner. You are only allowed one person in the OR with you. Don't forget to have them bring a phone and/or camera to take pictures! Any of the support staff will be happy to help you so keep your camera ready and ask for help!

Usually your baby is born within a few minutes of starting your surgery. Your baby will be born and one minute of delayed cord clamping will be performed. We will be happy to use a clear drape if you desire - just ask! The baby will be moved to the warmer temporarily to assess breathing and then once all clear can be moved to your chest for skin-to-skin or wrapped up and given to your partner to hold next to you. You will all go to the recovery room together as a family unit where you will do at least one hour of skin-to-skin time and coached on breastfeeding if you would like! Be sure to take plenty of pictures. Most people keep this recovery time private, but you are welcome to have visitors during this time if you'd like.

Pain

Usually you will not have much pain for the first 24 hours (you get long acting pain medication in your spinal that wears off about 24-36 hours post op) so the first day is a good time to start walking in the halls with assistance. Just ask your nurse when you are ready. Getting up and moving will help your bladder and bowels start moving and prevent postoperative constipation and blood clots.

You will get an anti-inflammatory medication in your IV, and we will offer you a narcotic pain medicine in a tablet form once this medication wears off from your spinal.

Some people like a postpartum girdle - others think it causes more pain. If you want to try one, you can ask your nurse.

Diet

You may have some nausea during surgery or after which is not uncommon. You will have some anti-nausea medication ordered, just ask for it if needed. Also avoid spicy foods or eating large volumes until you start passing gas.

It's best to avoid constipation. Will will provide stool softeners to take in the hospital and also recommend taking stool softeners until you have regular bowel movements. It is safe to take stool softeners while breastfeeding and we recommend you do so. Miralax is also a good medication to have on hand and use either preventatively or as treatment for constipation.

Drink 6-8 glasses of liquid a day (preferably water) to prevent constipation and help with milk supply. Try to drink a glass every time you feed the baby. If you develop hemorrhoids you may use preparation H, ice packs, or sitz baths. We can call you in a rectal suppository if they are persistent.

Bleeding

You will have bleeding for up to 6 weeks that will slowly become less red, then pink, then more of a yellow/brown coloration. You may initially pass a few blood clots and this is ok to watch as long as your bleeding is not excessive otherwise (soaking pads every hour). Your period will return on average 4-6 weeks after delivery or with cessation of breastfeeding, or about 8 months postpartum during breastfeeding. Your first period will be heavier than usual. Avoid tampons for 6 weeks. Pads may irritate your vulva, I recommend using a barrier on your vulva daily when wearing a pad like Aquaphor or Vaseline (or using period panties).

Incision

You will have a waterproof dressing placed over your incision at the end of the surgery which you will wear home and remove 7 days postpartum. You may shower normally after your surgery, but no baths for 6 weeks. If your dressing has notable drainage on it or you are noticing bruising around the dressing, this is normal. However, if it starts to drain out of the dressing, or if you develop redness that is expanding beyond the dressing, you need to call our office.

At first your incision will be pink and raised slightly. You may feel irregularities under your skin - these are dissolvable sutures. You can use scar cream like mederma after your skin has healed completely - for most people that is about 3 weeks postpartum. If you avoid the sun, your scar will become flat and your normal skin tone sooner. This will occur over the next few months. Finally, your skin may have sensitivity or numbness around the scar for several months which is normal - this is a normal healing of superficial nerves in the skin.

At home

Once you get home, you may not drive for 2 weeks. Also please do not drive while still requiring pain medication or if you feel unsteady walking or turning. You should not lift heavier than your baby for a few weeks. You may slowly assist your other children in climbing in the car; however, avoid directly lifting your toddler until 6 weeks postpartum. This may require you to feed siblings on the floor or have nap mats for nap time. You will probably need pain medication for a couple of weeks, with the worst pain being day 2-4 post surgery with rapid improvements thereafter.

You should get up and walk around daily for exercise/activity; however, no more strenuous exercise than walking for 6 weeks. Especially try to avoid activities that involve your abdominal muscles.

Sex

You may not have sex or anything in your vagina for 6 weeks. Even then, some of you will not be ready. Once you are ready, be sure to use lubrication as vaginal dryness is expected at this time.

Mental Health

After C-sections that follow a difficult labor, some moms feel relieved. But others feel sad, disappointed, or even guilty about needing a C-section.

- Many of these feelings are normal, even for women who had a vaginal birth.
- Try talking with your partner, family, or friends about your feelings.
- Seek help from your provider if these feelings do not go away or become worse.
- To help prevent the most serious form of postpartum depression, make sure you are getting at least 7 hours of cumulative sleep in a 24 hour period of time. Also, make sure you are getting out of your house to get some fresh air every day.

When to Call Us

Contact us if you have vaginal bleeding that:

- Is still very heavy (like your menstrual period flow) after more than 7 days
- Is light but lasts beyond 8 weeks
- Involves the passing of large clots

Also contact us if you have:

- Swelling in one of your legs (it will be red and warmer than the other leg)
- Pain in your calf
- Redness, warmth, swelling, or drainage from your incision site, or your incision breaks open
- Fever more than 101°F that persists (swollen breasts may cause a mild elevation of temperature)
- Increased pain that does not respond to pain medication
- Become very sad, depressed, or withdrawn, are having feelings of harming yourself or your baby, or are having trouble caring for yourself or your baby
- A tender, reddened, or warm area on one breast (this may be a sign of infection)

We are so honored that you trusted us with care. Please let us know if there is anything we can do or any question we can answer to make your delivery less stressful or more comfortable!