

What is a C-section?

A cesarean birth, also called a C-section, is a surgical delivery where your baby is born through incisions made in your lower abdomen and uterus.

They're performed when you cannot safely deliver a baby vaginally.

Sometimes C-sections are not planned but are done to ensure you and your baby's health—but sometimes you will know well ahead that you will be having a C-section for reasons such as:

- *If your baby is in the breach position where they would be born rump or feet first.*
- *If you're pregnant with multiple babies.*
- *If you have infections or health complications where a vaginal birth might not be safe, such as HIV, active herpes, or high blood pressure.*
- *If there are problems with the placenta.*
- *If there are health problems detected early on with the baby.*
- *Or if you've had a previous C-section and your provider or hospital won't perform a VBAC or vaginal birth after cesarean.*

How a C-section Happens — *Keep in mind that different surgeons may do things a little differently.*

First, you'll be given anesthesia that will numb you. Many women receive either an **epidural or Spinal block**.

This means you will be awake for the surgery. *If you've already been laboring and have an epidural in place, then that will be used.* But if you don't, then your surgeon will likely use a spinal block.

In an emergency, if the doctor believes it is safest for you to be asleep, then you would be given a general anesthesia. *But that's pretty rare.*

Next, you will be prepped for surgery. The area where the incision will be made, which is usually around the pubic hairline, is washed and may be shaved. You will get a catheter, which is a tube placed in your urethra to keep your bladder empty. You'll also receive an IV to give you fluids and medicines.

Once numb, your surgeon will make an incision through your abdominal wall. They will go through several layers, separating muscles to get to your uterus. An incision is made in the wall of the uterus to get to the baby. You will feel pressure, pulling, and tugging as they work to remove your baby. You should not feel any pain though some women report feeling nauseated during this part of the procedure.

This could take 30 to 45 minutes. *You might start shivering or shaking a bit during or after the surgery.* Don't worry if this happens. It's completely normal and caused by the medications you receive during the c-section.

Recovery

Like all surgeries, there will be pain. You will be given medicine to manage it, and you'll want to take it as prescribed to keep comfortable. If you're planning on breastfeeding, then let your provider know so they can prescribe the right kind of painkiller.

You can speed up your recovery by following your doctor's instructions carefully and by not lifting anything too heavy for a few weeks. You should avoid sex or putting anything into your vagina, such as tampons, for

a few weeks after surgery. *Plan on taking it easy, avoid doing anything strenuous, and try to sleep when your baby does.* In fact, it is really best to not make any plans for at least a few weeks after you return home to give yourself time to heal.

How to Prepare for a Cesarean Birth

First, talk with your provider and get all of your questions answered about the procedure, the recovery, the risks, and how to care for your body afterward.

Then, talk to your friends who have had C-sections to find out how they did. But let them know beforehand that you don't want to hear third-person over-the-top horror stories.

Next, line up help at home. You'll be sore, tired, and will need to rest when your baby sleeps.

Finally, prepare and freeze meals ahead of time that can easily be thawed and reheated. Have your baby's room ready and load up on diapers and supplies so that you won't have to run to the store during those first few weeks of recovery.

Wrapping Up

Having a baby is a big deal. It's normal to feel anxious or scared. And finding out that you may be delivering by C-section may feel overwhelming. But you can help by...

1. Learning as much as you can about the procedure and talking to others who have gone through it can help you feel more comfortable with it.
2. Preparing a birth plan will help ensure you still have those meaningful things at the birth, such as pictures or immediate skin-to-skin contact with your baby.
3. Planning for when you come home by preparing meals ahead and lining up help will enable you to focus on taking care of your newborn and on recovering.
4. Being easy on yourself will help. Remember, you're not only recovering from pregnancy, but also from surgery.
5. And finally, trying to stay calm, being flexible, and keeping your eye on the prize—coming home with a healthy newborn.

Resources:

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