

Elective caesarean section

If you know beforehand you'll be having a caesarean section, it's called an elective operation. Your appointment will probably be before the date your baby's due, so you don't go into labour.

Around 16 in 100 births are by planned caesarean.

Why you'd need an elective caesarean

You may need an elective caesarean section if:

- you have a very low-lying placenta which covers your cervix (placenta praevia) and blocks your baby's way out
- you're having twins, triplets or more - often twins are born vaginally, but if you're having triplets or more you'll almost certainly need one
- you have other health issues, which means a caesarean section is safer for you
- your baby is in a position which makes vaginal birth more difficult or impossible, such as if they're breech

If your obstetrician thinks it may be the best option for you and your baby, you can talk about it and decide together.

The obstetrician will make a:

- 10 to 15cm cut at the bottom of your abdomen, just at the top of your pubic hairline, which is big enough to deliver your baby through
- a cut through your womb to reach your baby, usually after a delay of one minute

You'll be given a regional or general anesthetic.



Delivering your baby

You may feel some tugging when your baby's lifted out – sometimes this is done by hand and sometimes with a pair of forceps.

Your baby will:

- have their umbilical cord clamped and cut
- be quickly checked over and if everything is well they'll be passed to you or your partner, so you can hold them and have skin-to-skin contact.

The placenta and membranes are delivered next then the cut in your womb and abdomen are closed with stitches.

It normally takes about 10 minutes to deliver your baby, and 30 to 40 minutes to complete the stitches.

After the procedure

After having a caesarean section, you'll:

- be given painkillers to reduce any discomfort
- be encouraged to get out of bed and move around as soon as possible
- have a thin, flexible tube called a catheter in your bladder for the first 12 hours to drain away urine
- have a dressing covering your wound for at least 24 hours

You can eat and drink as soon as you feel hungry or thirsty.

How long you'll be in hospital after the operation varies, but for some women it's 48 hours or less.

Recovering from a caesarean

Recovering from a caesarean usually takes longer than recovering from a vaginal delivery.

The average stay in hospital after a caesarean is around 4 days, compared with an average of 2 days for a vaginal birth.

You may experience some discomfort in your tummy for the first few days. You'll be offered painkillers to help with this.

When you go home, you'll need to take things easy at first. You may need to avoid some activities, such as driving, until you have had your postnatal check-up with the doctor at 6 weeks.

The wound in your tummy will eventually form a scar. This may be obvious at first, but it should fade with time and will often be hidden in your pubic hair.

Future pregnancies after a caesarean

If you have a baby by caesarean, it does not necessarily mean that any babies you have in the future will also have to be delivered this way.

Most women who have had a caesarean section can safely have a vaginal delivery for their next baby, known as vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC).

But you may need some extra monitoring during labour just to make sure everything is progressing well.

Some women may be advised to have another caesarean if they have another baby.

This depends on whether a caesarean is still the safest option for them and their baby.