

Four things you need to know about having a cesarean section

May 3 2023, by Claire Parker-Farthing



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If you're pregnant or planning to have a baby soon, you've probably been given lots of advice and information about what you might experience during and after the birth. But less information is often given about what to expect if you should need or choose to have a cesarean section.

There are many reasons why a cesarean may be performed, though typically it happens for medical reasons (for example, if the baby's or mother's health is at risk during labor). But it's also possible to opt to have a [cesarean without clinical need](#).

Someone may opt for a cesarean for reasons including fear around labor and [birth](#), previous traumatic birth experiences or to ensure their partner can be present (for example, if they work abroad or serve in the armed forces).

Regardless of where and how you decide to give birth, it's important to make sure you're also informed about what to expect when it comes to having a cesarean section.

Cesarean birth is a [major surgery](#) and as such is not risk free. But while we can never eliminate the risks entirely, advances in surgery and healthcare also mean cesarean births are safer now than they've ever been.

Here are four important things to know:

1. Surgical complications are a risk

[Up to 15% of women](#) may experience post-surgery wound infections. And although less common, damage to [internal organs](#) and [blood clots](#) can also happen (though only in about less than 1% of cases), alongside [greater blood loss](#) compared with a vaginal birth.

Any [surgical complications](#) that arise may mean you have to stay in hospital longer while undergoing treatment. While this may temporarily affect infant feeding and how you [bond with your baby](#), this is unlikely to have any long-term consequences for your relationship with your baby.

2. It can affect future pregnancies

Having a cesarean is also likely to mean a more [complex subsequent pregnancy](#) and birth, with research suggesting it increases chances of placental complications, greater blood loss and scar rupture, alongside [scar tissue](#) forming between your organs.

There is also a slightly increased chance of [infertility](#) and [stillbirth](#) after having a cesarean birth—although the reasons for this remain unknown, and the numbers remain very small.

If you have a cesarean the first time you give birth, it may also increase your chances of needing to have a cesarean at your next birth. This is due to the more complex nature of having a scar on your uterus during pregnancy and birth, and the extra care needed making you more high risk.

The second cesarean surgery itself may also potentially take longer due to the scar tissue from the previous surgery—which may also [increase the risk of greater blood loss and infection](#).

This may be worth considering if you're planning to opt for a cesarean birth, particularly if you would like to have more than one baby as it may affect your future pregnancies.

3. There are some potential risks to the baby

Cesarean birth may also carry certain risks to the baby versus a vaginal birth.

For example, around 2% of babies can suffer [skin lacerations from the operation](#). They also may need special or [intensive care](#)), as they're more

likely to have [breathing problems](#) compared to babies born vaginally.

Some research also suggests babies born via cesarean may be more susceptible to [developing asthma and diabetes](#). It's still uncertain why this is the case, but may be due to the fact that babies aren't exposed to certain bacteria which are important for developing their microbiome.

4. Scheduled birth can be a benefit

If you opt to have a cesarean birth for whatever reason, there may be some benefits.

For example, a cesarean birth is more predictable, which can be helpful for you if you want more [control over your birth experience](#)—especially if you are feeling anxious about giving birth.

Some studies also show a potential link between lower chances of [developing urinary incontinence and prolapse](#) with a cesarean birth. But it's important to weigh these potential benefits against the risks that come alongside cesarean birth.

Making your choice

While thinking about your preferences on how you plan to give birth, consider asking your midwife or doctor what your full range of options are. They will also help you to develop a specific personalized plan depending on your preferences and circumstances.

You may also want to ask your doctor or midwife about what can be done to minimize risks of complications to your or your baby if you need or choose to have a cesarean.

If considering a cesarean, it's worth voicing your preferences at the earliest opportunity in your pregnancy to help your care providers offer you the best support, tailored to your needs.

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