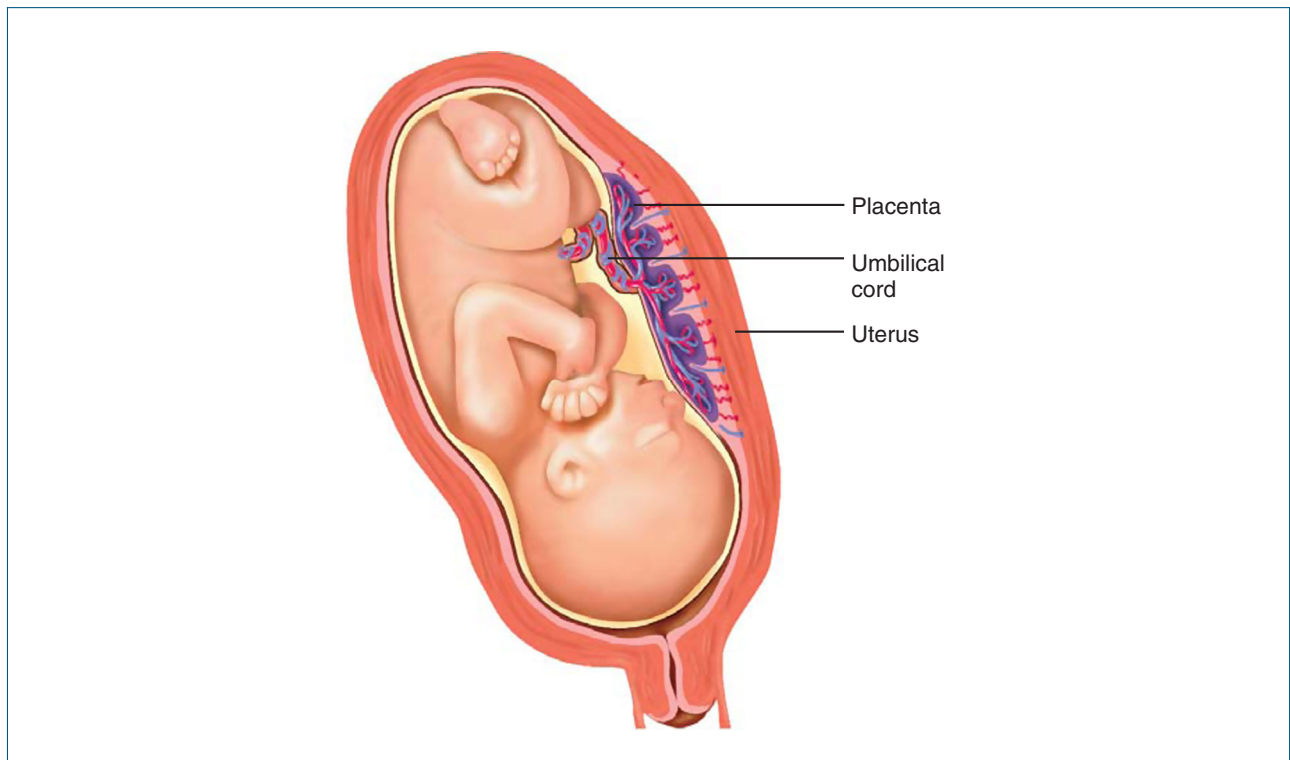




Clamping and Cutting the Umbilical Cord After Birth

What is the umbilical cord?

The umbilical cord connects your baby to the placenta (afterbirth) in the uterus. The placenta and umbilical cord form in your uterus along with your baby during pregnancy. The placenta helps your baby breathe and grow before birth. The umbilical cord has blood vessels that carry oxygen and food from the placenta to your baby. The umbilical cord also carries wastes from your baby to the placenta.



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What happens to the umbilical cord and placenta at birth?

After your baby is born, the placenta and umbilical cord keep moving blood back and forth for a few minutes while your baby starts to breathe. After a few minutes, your provider will put 2 clamps on the umbilical cord. Then the cord is cut between the 2 clamps. After the umbilical cord is clamped and cut, your baby is no longer attached to the placenta, which will come out soon.

When should the umbilical cord be clamped and cut?

In the past, the umbilical cord was clamped and cut as soon as the baby was born. Now studies have shown that waiting for a few minutes is better. This waiting is called “delayed cord clamping.” The best number of minutes to wait is still being studied. Some health care providers like to wait until the blood in the cord is no longer moving back and forth. This usually means the job of the placenta is done. The umbilical cord may be clamped and cut quickly if your baby needs medical care right after birth.



What are the benefits of waiting to clamp and cut the umbilical cord?

When the umbilical cord is not clamped and cut right after the baby is born, the baby gets more of their own blood back into their body. Getting extra blood may lower the chance of your baby having low iron levels at 4 to 6 months of life and may help your baby's health in other ways.

Could waiting to clamp and cut the umbilical cord cause any problems for my baby or me?

Waiting to clamp and cut the umbilical cord after birth does not cause problems for babies or mothers. Health care providers used to be worried that waiting to clamp and cut the umbilical cord might increase jaundice (yellowing of the baby's skin). Large studies found jaundice does not happen more often when you wait to clamp and cut the umbilical cord.

Is it safe to wait to clamp and cut the umbilical cord if my baby is born early?

If your baby is preterm (born more than 3 weeks before your due date), it is recommended to wait about 60 seconds before clamping and cutting the umbilical cord. Your health care provider may hold the baby lower than your abdomen (belly) to help the blood in the cord flow towards your baby faster during this short period of time. Preterm babies have less chance of dying while in the hospital if they have 60 seconds of delayed cord clamping.

Does the umbilical cord have to be clamped and cut right away if I have a cesarean birth?

No. Your health care provider can wait before clamping and cutting the umbilical cord after your baby is born by cesarean.

Does the umbilical cord have to be clamped and cut right away if the cord is wrapped around my baby's neck?

It is common for the umbilical cord to be loosely wrapped around the baby's neck at the time of birth. Most babies don't have any problems from this. Your health care provider can usually unwrap the umbilical cord and then wait before clamping and cutting it.

How do I know if my health care provider waits to clamp and cut the umbilical cord at birth?

While you are pregnant, talk to your health care provider about waiting to clamp and cut the umbilical cord. This is a decision you can make together as you plan for your labor and birth.

For More Information

World Health Organization

http://www.who.int/elena/titles/cord_clamping/en/

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 7.9

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