



# Lowering Your Chance of Cesarean Birth

## What is a cesarean birth?

A cesarean birth (cesarean section, c-section) is a surgery done so your baby is born through your abdomen. Cesareans are usually done when labor is not going normally. The contractions (muscles getting tight) of your uterus (womb) may not be strong enough. Your cervix (opening to the womb) may not be dilating (opening) enough for your baby to get through it. Your baby may not be moving down far enough to come out of your vagina. Cesarean birth may also be chosen if you or your baby has a health emergency.

## Why should I try to avoid having a cesarean birth?

Cesarean birth takes longer to physically recover from than vaginal birth. If you have more than one cesarean birth, you have a higher chance of having other health problems if you become pregnant in the future. For these reasons, many health care providers are looking at ways to avoid cesarean birth unless it is needed for your health or your baby's health.

## What problems could I have after a cesarean birth?

Cesarean birth is a surgery. After this surgery, women have pain where the opening was made in the skin and muscles of their abdomen so their baby could be born. Women who have a cesarean birth have more bleeding and a higher chance of infection than women who have a vaginal birth. Women who have a cesarean birth sometimes have a harder time breastfeeding in the first few days after birth.

## What can I do during my pregnancy to lower my chance of having a cesarean birth?

- Choose a birth setting that has a low cesarean rate. Cesarean rates are high in some hospitals and low in others. Women who do not need to have a hospital birth for health reasons can plan to give birth in a birth center or at home with a qualified health care provider. Cesarean rates are lower for women who labor in birth centers or at home than for women who labor in a hospital.
- Be physically active. Try to exercise for at least 30 minutes, 5 times a week. Women who are physically strong are less likely to have a cesarean birth than are women who do not exercise regularly.
- If you have herpes, taking medication to prevent outbreaks in the last month of pregnancy can keep you from having herpes lesions (sores) when you are in labor. Some health care providers recommend a cesarean birth if you have a herpes lesion near your vagina during labor.
- If your baby is breech (baby's head is turned up toward your chest instead of down toward your vagina) in your last month of pregnancy, a health care provider can try to turn your baby into a safer position for a vaginal birth. This is called external version.
- If you are a week or more past your due date (41 weeks' gestation or more), having your labor induced lowers your chance of having a cesarean birth compared to waiting to go into labor on your own.
- Talk with your health care provider while you are still pregnant about what you want during labor and birth. This gives you the chance to find out how your provider will work with you to help you have a vaginal birth.

## What can I do during labor to lower my chance of having a cesarean birth?

- Don't go to the hospital too early. Wait until you are having strong, regular contractions to go to the hospital. Staying at home as long as you can during the early part of labor makes it easier for you to relax between contractions, move freely, and eat and drink as you choose.
- Have someone stay with you through your whole labor and birth. Doulas are labor support experts. They provide information during labor and birth, help you cope with labor pain, and support you and your partner through labor. If you don't have a doula, a family member or friend can be your labor support person.
- Avoid use of continuous (all the time) fetal heart rate monitoring if possible. If you are low risk, do not have epidural analgesia for your labor pain, and your labor is not being induced, you can ask that the fetal heart rate be checked intermittently (off and on) so you have freedom to move around during your labor.



## What should I discuss with my health care provider if they recommend a cesarean birth during labor?

If your provider recommends that you have a cesarean birth, and it is not a health emergency for you or your baby, ask your provider:

- Why is a cesarean birth being recommended?
- Are there any other things for me to do now that might help avoid a cesarean birth?
- What are the pros and cons of doing a cesarean birth now for my baby and me?
- What are the pros and cons of the other things I could do now?

## What if I have had a cesarean birth before?

Years ago, all women who had one cesarean birth were told it was safest to have cesarean births for the rest of their pregnancies. However, about 7 out of every 10 women who have had one cesarean birth before can safely have a vaginal birth when they have another baby. This is called a vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC). Talk with your health care provider to see if being in labor is safe for you. It is also important to find out if the hospital where you're planning to give birth allows women who have had a cesarean birth to have labor and a VBAC.

### For More Information

#### Birth Options after Having a Cesarean Should I Have a Cesarean Section?

[www.sharewithwomen.org](http://www.sharewithwomen.org)

#### Cesarean Prevention Recommendations from Obstetric Leaders: What Pregnant Women Need to Know

<https://www.leapfroggroup.org/sites/default/files/Files/new-cesarean-prevention.pdf>

#### Decrease your Chance of Having a Cesarean Section

<https://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book-excerpts/health-article/decreasing-your-chance-of-having-a-cesarean-section/>

#### Vaginal Birth after Cesarean Delivery

<https://www.acog.org/patient-resources/faqs/labor-delivery-and-postpartum-care/vaginal-birth-after-cesarean-delivery>

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