

CAESAREAN BIRTH



Postpartum Parent Support Program

Information

General Information

A Caesarean birth allows for delivery of an infant when complications occur and the infant or mother are at risk. The baby is delivered by an operation (surgery) through a cut in the mother's abdomen. For this operation, the mother is given an anesthetic (a gas) which puts her to sleep (general anaesthesia). Or she may have freezing (regional or localized anaesthesia) of the abdominal area, causing numbness from the waist and downwards, that allows her to stay awake for the delivery of the baby and to feel no pain. Spinal and epidural are the types of regional or localized anaesthesia used for Caesarean births.

For the first 24 hours after surgery, you may be sleepy and feel pain around the incision. Medication is available to relieve this pain by a number of ways. Many hospitals use a method of giving pain medication, called patient controlled analgesia (medicine that controls pain) or PCA for 24-48 hours after surgery. With PCA, pain medicine is given by an intravenous pump according to the patient's own needs. The woman uses a switch on the pump to give herself pain medication as needed. A safety device on the machine does not allow overdosing or the giving of too much medicine. You may have an indwelling catheter in your bladder and you may be fed intravenously until you are ready to take food by mouth again. Your nurse or doctor will answer questions about caring for the incision.

Following a Caesarean birth, you probably will experience a variety of emotions including disappointment and relief. These feelings are normal and are to be expected. As well, during this period of physical and sexual adjustment, you might feel vulnerable and need extra attention, cuddling and reassuring. Don't be hesitant about discussing your feelings with your nurse, doctor, partner and other mothers who have had a Caesarean birth.

After surgery, you will be encouraged to do deep-breathing, coughing and leg exercises while in bed. When you get out of bed for the first time, a nurse will assist you. A gradual increase in activity, including walking, will help to decrease gas and promote healing. Gas pains, common after a Caesarean birth, will vary in severity.

The area around the cut (incision) may feel numb or have a tugging or pulling sensation. Placing a pillow across the incision, especially when coughing, may help decrease this

sensation. The incision should be completely healed within a few weeks, but you may continue to feel some tenderness for up to two months.

Return to Your Pre-Pregnant State

You will be given a liquid diet at first, and then a soft diet of jellies and custards, with a gradual return to normal eating. In this way, gas pains and constipation will be reduced. Some mothers are surprised that there is a vaginal blood flow after a Caesarean birth. This flow, lochia, is part of the process of the uterus returning to its pre-pregnant state. At home, as you increase your activities, you may feel more comfortable using beltless napkins.

Sexual Relations

The decision about when to resume intercourse is personal. The only right time is when both partners feel comfortable. Women are often concerned about:

- a) the incision during intercourse;
- b) partner's feelings about the incision;
- c) a decrease in lubrication in the vagina (this is a result of hormonal changes and breast-feeding -- lubricating jelly applied to the vagina will make penetration easier);
- d) vaginal flow that lasts from two to six weeks postpartum.

Note: It is possible to ovulate and become pregnant as early as in the first six weeks postpartum; therefore it is necessary to use some method of birth control.

Infant Feeding

If you are feeling well enough, you may feed your baby right after delivery (in the recovery room) if surgery is done using regional or localized anaesthesia. Or you may feed within a few hours of delivery after surgery using general anaesthesia. When breastfeeding for the first few feedings, you may feel most comfortable lying on your side supported by a pillow. When sitting up to feed your baby, place a pillow across your abdomen to increase your comfort. You may find the "football" hold useful. Ask for the Breastfeeding information sheet.

We encourage you to:

- a) Rest, eat well and drink plenty of fluids to help the healing process;
- b) Exercise (ask for the Postnatal Exercise information sheet)
- c) Undertake "Rooming-In."

Is the saying, "Once a Caesarean always a Caesarean" true? Not necessarily. However, you should discuss the reasons why the baby was delivered by Caesarean birth with the obstetrician and ask if he or she is willing to discuss VBAC (Vaginal birth after Caesarean) as a possibility for the delivery of your next baby.

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