

Preparing for Cesarean Birth

Not all babies are born vaginally. Sometimes they are born by a surgery called a “Cesarean section.” You may also hear it called Cesarean birth, C-section, or just Cesarean. During the surgery, your doctor will make incisions in your abdomen and uterus, and then remove your baby from your uterus.

Some Cesarean births are scheduled in advance. Others take place after labor has begun, or when there is an urgent situation before labor starts.

Your prenatal healthcare provider may advise you to have a Cesarean birth if:

- You have had a Cesarean birth before.
- Your baby’s bottom, feet, or hands are closest to your cervix.
- You have certain medical or obstetric conditions.
- Your baby shows signs of stress during labor.
- Your baby is too big to pass through your birth canal.
- Labor is not progressing in a way that ensures a vaginal delivery.

Having a Cesarean Birth

Cesarean births usually take place in an operating room (OR) on the Labor & Delivery Unit. Your partner may sit close by you during the surgery and birth of your baby, as long as you are awake.

The Labor & Delivery Unit specializes in caring for women and their babies during pregnancy and childbirth. Obstetricians, nurses, anesthesiologists, and other staff are on hand 24 hours a day.

Pediatricians and other providers will also be at your birth to make sure your baby has a safe transition.



After a Cesarean birth, most mothers and babies stay in the Labor & Delivery Unit for 1 to 2 hours

See the chapter “Your Healthcare Team” in this book to learn more about what each provider on your healthcare team does.

A Planned Cesarean Birth

If you are having a planned Cesarean birth, you will be scheduled for a clinic visit before surgery. At this visit:

- We will talk about how to prepare for the birth.
- You will have a physical exam and lab tests.
- You will be able to talk with an anesthesiologist.
- Your healthcare provider will let you know the date and estimated time of your surgery. Your provider will also tell you when to arrive and where to go on the morning of your birth.
- Do not eat or drink anything for at least 8 hours before your scheduled surgery.
- Please call Labor & Delivery by 5 a.m. the day of the birth to confirm your arrival time.

Sometimes an *amniocentesis* or an *ultrasound* may also be scheduled for the same day as your clinic visit before surgery. Your healthcare provider will talk with you about this.

Getting Ready for Surgery

Preparing you for surgery may take place either in your room or in the operating room.

When we prepare you for surgery, we will:

- Start an *intravenous* (IV) line in your arm to give you fluids and medicines
- Draw blood for tests your provider requests
- Insert a tube (*catheter*) into your bladder to drain your urine
- Clean your skin and clip hair from the area where your incision will be

Anesthesia

Anesthetics are medicines that reduce or prevent pain. Your anesthesia provider will talk with you about what to expect during your surgery. Most Cesarean births are done using a *spinal* (a single dose of pain medicine placed into the spinal fluid).

Rarely, a mother's or baby's medical condition may mean *general anesthesia* is needed. If this occurs:

- You will be asleep during your Cesarean birth.
- Your support person will be asked to return to the waiting area.

Please see the chapter “Pain Relief During Labor” in this book for more information about anesthesia.

How long does the surgery take?

The entire procedure, from beginning the anesthesia to closing the incision, takes about 1 to 1½ hours.

After Your Baby Is Born

After your baby is born and the cord is cut, she will be handed to the pediatrician and moved to the baby warmer, just steps away from you. In the minutes after birth, the pediatrician will check your baby. Then your baby will be swaddled in a warm blanket and hat.

If your baby is healthy and stable, she will be brought to you and your partner. When possible, your nurse will help with skin-to-skin contact between you and your baby, and will help you begin breastfeeding.

Sometimes, babies will go to a Special Care Nursery, or to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at UW Medical Center or Valley Medical Center for care and observation. Your partner may stay with you or go with your baby. Babies do not usually need to stay there very long.

Most times, you and your baby will return to your room after surgery. If you did not already start breastfeeding in the operating room, your nurse will help you get started as soon as you are ready. Your nurse will help place your baby to your breast and help you find a comfortable position for feeding. Your nurse will also pay close attention to your physical needs as you begin to recover from the surgery.

Depending on the UW Medicine hospital you choose, you, your partner, and your new baby may:

- Stay in your Labor & Delivery room until you are ready to go home
- Move to a different room 1 to 2 hours after a Cesarean birth to finish your recovery

Going Home

- Most women who have a **planned Cesarean birth** go home in the late afternoon or early evening 2 days after the day of surgery. For example, if your birth is on a Monday, you may go home on a Wednesday afternoon or evening.
- If you have an **emergency Cesarean birth**, your hospital stay may be longer.

Questions?

Your questions are important.

If you have questions about Cesarean birth, please ask your healthcare provider or your nurse.