

Advice following an emergency caesarean section

Information and advice for mothers

Maternity

You may have come into hospital expecting to give birth normally and for some reason you have had an emergency caesarean section. You might be feeling:

- confused and upset
- sore and uncomfortable
- disappointed or even a failure

This is quite normal and you will need time to come to terms with your experience.

In some situations you might have had the operation very quickly and everything becomes a blur. You might even have had a general anaesthetic which means you will have been put to sleep for the operation. This can leave you with very confused feelings and you might also experience some symptoms you don't recognise such as being tearful and frightened even though you are safe at home. This is common when you have been in an emergency situation and you or your baby's life is at risk; you may be suffering from shock or trauma; this will pass in time but it helps to talk about your feelings.

Why did I need a caesarean section?

After the operation the doctor will have spoken briefly about the reasons why you needed the caesarean section although you may still feel you need time to come to terms with everything.

Some of the reasons women have an emergency caesarean section are:

- their labour doesn't progress
- the baby becomes distressed during the labour
- the baby is in a difficult position
- they develop a problem during labour such as bleeding

In any case, a caesarean section would have been recommended and performed in the interest of you and your baby.

We encourage you to discuss anything that is not clear about your caesarean while the experience is still fresh in your mind. The best way to get answers to any questions you may have is by asking the midwives and doctors who looked after you, while you are still in hospital. They will be happy to discuss things with you. If you would rather wait an appointment can be made for you at a later date. Make a note of things when they come into your head so you can remember to ask all the things that have worried or upset you.

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Recovering from an emergency caesarean section

Pain

While you are still in hospital the midwife will ask you about your level of pain and give you painkillers to help you stay comfortable. If you are in pain, please let us know so that we can help you. If your pain is difficult to manage let us know and we can involve the anaesthetist who will look at what will best suit you and your pain. You will be given help with getting out of bed, feeding your baby and looking after yourself.

Your stay in hospital

If you make a normal recovery you can expect to go home after 2-3 days and you must ensure that you have lots of help at home for at least the first 2 weeks.

Your wound and stitches

The midwife will check you over regularly and make sure your wound is healing well and there are no signs of infection. He/she will explain how you can look after your wound once you are at home.

You may have some bruising and or swelling along the scar but this will soon disappear; if you have clips in your wound the midwife will remove these for you. Often the wound is stitched without the stitches being visible; this means that you do not have to have the stitches removed. The midwife will advise you how the surgeon has repaired the skin and will advise you of how to care for your wound. Once you are discharged if you are worried at any time about your wound please discuss with the midwife when she visits you at home or call using the emergency numbers provided.

Going home

Once you are home you should continue to rest and take any prescribed medication that you have been given so that you can recover properly. The community midwife will visit you the next day and will explain the routine of home visiting for you and your baby.

Your midwife will ensure that you are healing well and are coping at home. If your mood is low and you find that you are tearful discuss with the midwife when she visits; this may be normal following a stressful time but it may be a sign of postnatal depression early in your recovery. If you appear to be finding it difficult you will be offered an appointment to discuss your feelings with a specialist

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Caring for yourself

You should have a shower or bath daily and keep your wound clean and dry. You should also change your sanitary towel frequently. You may find that your blood loss is light and appears to stop quickly, however the more you do the more the blood loss will increase.

Returning to normal activities

You may start to do your usual activities at home when you feel more like yourself. There are no time restrictions as everyone is different; however remember you have had a serious operation and should rest more frequently. You should leave heavy tasks such as vacuuming, standing to iron for long periods and heavy housework until 6 weeks after your caesarean.

Sex

You can resume sexual intimacy at any point; there is no right time however most women wait until their wound has healed and the blood loss has stopped. You must use contraceptives at all times if you do not want to have another baby quickly, as you can conceive anytime after the birth.

Driving

You should avoid driving for at least 6 weeks after your caesarean, and will need to contact your insurance company for more information about when you can return to driving.

Symptoms to report

Please contact your midwife or GP as soon as possible if you experience any of the following:

- Feeling unwell
- Feeling hot and feverish
- Pain that is new or becoming worse
- Signs of a wound infection: redness, swelling or oozing from the wound

Please contact your midwife or GP urgently if you experience any of the following:

- Swelling and tenderness in the back of your leg(s)
- Shortness of breath
- Pain when breathing

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Future pregnancies

It is important to know that having one caesarean section will not often determine how your next baby might be born. 75 out of 100 women who have had one caesarean section will have a normal birth in the future. If you become pregnant again your doctor or midwife will discuss your birth plan with you during the antenatal period and will advise you of any precautions you may need to take.

Although most women can plan to have a normal birth, some may be advised to have a planned caesarean section

Follow-up

Your GP will be notified that you have had an emergency caesarean section and of your discharge home. Most women go home to be cared for by their midwife, GP and health visitor; you will have a check-up at the surgery with your GP at around 6 weeks after the birth.

If the doctor who performed your operation wants you to come back for a follow up appointment this will be arranged for you about 6 weeks after the operation. The consultant will check how you have recovered, will ask you questions about your recovery and discuss with you the reasons why you needed an emergency caesarean. They will also offer you any health advice you may need and advise you about future pregnancies.

Planning your next pregnancy

Before you leave hospital the midwife will complete the information below. Please keep this safe for future reference as it may be useful when planning your next pregnancy.

You have had an emergency caesarean section and the reason for this was (please tick):

- Foetal distress
- Failure to progress in 1st stage of labour
- Failure to progress in 2nd stage of labour
- Malpresentation of foetus
- Obstetric emergency (cord prolapse, APH)
- Failed induction of labour
- Other _____

Your cervix dilated to _____ cms before the caesarean section was performed.

Discussed the reason for a caesarean section with a doctor before going home: Yes / No

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Further information

If you have any problems following your caesarean, please contact your community midwife or GP.

For more information on your options for giving birth after a previous caesarean section and about pregnancy and childbirth in general please visit the maternity pages on our website: www.swbh.nhs.uk/services/maternity

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website www.swbh.nhs.uk, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence, CG13 'Caesarean section', April 2004

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5303 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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