

After Your Cesarean Birth

Congratulations on the birth of your baby! This chapter provides basic information about recovery after your Cesarean birth. If your doctor gave you different information, follow those instructions.



Let your family and friends help take care of you and your baby while you recover from your surgery.

Recovering in the Hospital

You will have these medical devices while you are recovering after your surgery:

Intravenous Line

The *intravenous line* (IV) from your surgery will stay in your arm while you are recovering. The IV is used to give your body water, sugar, salt, and sometimes medicines. It will stay in place until you can drink and eat after surgery. Once you can drink fluids well and the IV is no longer needed for medical reasons, it will be removed. This is usually about 24 hours after birth.

Foley Catheter

During surgery, a thin flexible tube called a *Foley catheter* drains urine from your bladder. It will stay in place for 18 to 24 hours after birth. You will not need to get up to the bathroom to pass urine until it is taken out. After the catheter is out, your nurse may ask you to measure your urine a few times to make sure your kidneys and bladder are working well.

Sequential Compression Devices

You will have *sequential compression devices* (SCDs) on your legs until you can get up and walk often. This is usually during the first 24 hours after birth. SCDs gently inflate and deflate around your calves to improve blood flow. They help decrease the chance of developing a *deep vein thrombosis* (DVT), a serious blood clot.

Your Incision

Your incision (cut) will be either:

- Along your pubic hairline (“bikini” or “horizontal”). The medical name for this kind of incision is *Pfannenstiel*.
- From below your navel to the top of your pubic bone. The medical name for this kind of incision is *midline vertical*.

The kind of incision you have on your uterus may be different from what you see on your skin. Most uterine incisions are *low transverse* (across the low part of the uterus). Your doctor will tell you if you have a different kind of cut, such as a *classical* (vertical) incision on your uterus. Most women who have a classical uterine incision are advised to have Cesarean births for future deliveries.

Caring for Your Incision

The bandage over your incision will be taken off after 48 hours. Your skin will be held together with stitches under your skin. You will have Steri-Strips (thin pieces of white tape) or metal staples across your incision.

If your incision was closed with staples, they will probably be removed and replaced with Steri-Strips before you go home. At home, you can shower with the Steri-Strips over your incision.

If the Steri-Strips do not fall off on their own within 7 days after your surgery, remove them. You do not need to cover your incision after that.

Precautions

- Do **not** take a bath, soak in a hot tub, or go swimming for 2 weeks after your delivery.
- **Call your doctor or clinic right away if your incision:**
 - Gets more tender or more red
 - Is oozing
 - Has a bad smell
 - Opens

Managing Pain

Please see the chapter “Pain Control After a Cesarean Birth.”

Activity Level

In the Hospital

It is important to change positions in bed after your surgery. About 10 to 12 hours after surgery, your nurse will help you sit up on the edge of your bed.

Within 18 to 24 hours, your nurse will help you to get up and walk around your room, then in the hall. Be sure to call your nurse for help before trying to stand or walk. You may feel dizzy. **Do not get out of bed without help.**

If your baby is in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) or Progressive Care Nursery (PCN), you can visit your baby as soon as you feel up to it and can get there safely.

At Home

You may feel tired and weak after your Cesarean birth. Be sure to allow yourself 6 weeks to rest and recover. Let your family and friends help at home so you can use your energy to care for your baby.

- A slow return to normal activity is best. Rest several times a day.
- Do not lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 10 pounds for the first few weeks.
- Climb stairs only if you need to.
- Never drive when you are taking pain medicines that contain *opioids*. These are substances that affect your reaction time and make driving unsafe.
- Your healthcare provider may also advise you not to drive while your incision is healing.
- Check with your doctor or other healthcare provider before going back to very active exercise such as jogging or aerobics.

Food and Nutrition

Your doctor will write an order for the type of diet to follow after your Cesarean birth. Ask your nurse when you can start to eat and drink. It will probably feel best for your first meal after your surgery to be a small one.

We advise some of our patients, including most with diabetes, to wait to drink liquids until they are passing gas. To help move gas, sit up on the side of your bed or in a chair, or walk in your room or in the hall. Remember to call a nurse for help getting out of bed.

Postpartum Checkup

Call to schedule a checkup for 6 weeks after birth, unless your provider asks you to come in sooner. The purpose of this visit is to check how your incision is healing and to give you time to talk about your concerns and questions. You may want to make a list of your questions to bring with you to this visit.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your healthcare provider if you have questions about taking care of yourself after a Cesarean birth.

When your provider's office is closed, call UWMC Labor & Delivery at 206.598.4616.

If you have a medical emergency call 911.