



Going home after a caesarean birth

Healing after a caesarean birth is different for everyone. Here are some tips to help you:

- care for your wound
- manage pain
- move around and exercise
- get emotional support
- understand how your caesarean may affect future pregnancies and births.

Caring for your wound

It's important to take care of your wound properly after a caesarean birth to help it heal well and prevent infection.

Your wound dressing

After your caesarean birth, your wound will be covered with a dressing. It should stay on for 7 days after birth. To protect your wound, wear underwear that sits high above your wound.

Your dressing is waterproof and safe to wear in the shower. When you shower, face away from the water to stop it from spraying directly on the dressing. This helps keep the dressing in place and prevents it from getting too wet.

If you think the dressing is too wet, looks like water has gotten inside, or seems dirty, tell your midwife or local doctor (GP).

The midwife will replace your dressing if it falls off while you're in the hospital. If it falls off at home before 7 days, the midwife visiting you at home will check your wound and decide if you need a new one. It's important to keep the wound clean and dry, and that you wash your hands before and after touching the dressing or the wound.

After 7 days, if the dressing is still in place, you, your partner, or a support person can take the dressing off. Or your GP can do it.

Some wounds also have small strips under the dressing called 'steri-strips'. You can take these off after 7 days or trim them to make them more comfortable. If you do this, you will need a very clean pair of scissors.

Stitches

Most stitches dissolve on their own. If you have stitches or staples that don't dissolve, they will be taken out before you go home or during a home visit. This usually happens between days 5 and 10 after giving birth.

Sometimes, a small part of the stitch might stick out of the wound. This is not a problem unless the wound opens up or looks infected. You might feel more soreness on one side of the wound or notice a small lump where the stitch is tied. This will get better over time.

If you're worried, talk to your GP.

Protecting your wound

Keep your wound clean and dry.

- To protect your wound:
 - wear comfortable high-waisted underwear instead of bikini styles
 - wear loose-fitting clothing so air can reach your wound
 - put a sanitary pad or panty liner on your wound with the soft side against your skin. This may feel more comfortable. Change it every day. Your underwear will help hold it in place.



Wear underwear that sits high above your wound.

- After the dressing comes off:
 - when you shower, wash your wound with water only and gently pat it dry with a clean towel
 - don't use powders or sprays on your wound
 - always wash your hands with soap and water before and after you check your wound. You can take a photo to see how it changes or ask someone to check it for you.
- For the first 6 weeks, try to not to lift anything heavier than your baby. Get help with any activities that involve lifting and bending when you can.

Your wound will heal over the next few weeks and months. You might feel mild cramping, pain, and numbness in the skin around the cut. Most people feel better by 6 weeks, but some numbness and pain can last for several months. If this continues, talk to your GP.

Unexpected changes to your wound

Wound infections can occur after a caesarean birth and affect about 15 out of 100 people (15%). Look out for these signs that your wound might be infected:

- increased pain and the area feels hot to touch
- more redness, swelling, or puffiness around the wound
- smelly discharge or fresh bleeding from the wound
- the wound starts to open
- fever (temperature above 38° Celsius), feeling very hot or cold, or extreme tiredness

Contact your GP or go to your closest Emergency Department if you notice any of these signs.

Most infections can be treated with antibiotic medicine.

In some cases, you might need to go back into the hospital for stronger antibiotics given through a drip (intravenous antibiotics).

Managing pain

After a caesarean, it's normal to feel pain. You might feel uncomfortable or have pain for a few days or weeks. You may feel this pain when you move around, lie down, get up, or rest.

You can manage this pain with simple pain medicines. It's very important for your recovery to take your pain medicine regularly. You'll get a prescription for pain relief to use at home. Please take your medicines as directed.

Don't wait until you're in a lot of pain to take your medicine. It works best when you take it early to stop pain from getting worse.

Moving around and exercise

Being active after giving birth can help you heal. Short walks or gentle exercises at home are good, but don't push yourself too hard or cause yourself pain.

For the first 6 weeks, follow these tips:

- don't lift anything heavier than your baby
- avoid movements that hurt, like bending or stretching up or down
- wait at least 2 weeks before driving. Only drive if you're not taking strong (or prescription only) pain medicine. If you're not sure, ask your GP. Check with your insurance provider about how long you need to wait before driving. Some insurers only allow driving after 6 weeks.

- avoid sex during the first 6 weeks. Only have sex when you feel ready, and make sure to use contraception when you do.

Getting emotional support

Some people feel happy about having a caesarean. Others may feel disappointed or sad, especially if it wasn't what they expected. It can be very helpful to talk about your feelings with your partner, family, healthcare professionals, or other support people.

Looking after a new baby is hard for all new parents. Be kind to yourself. It may take a few weeks or longer to feel better, especially if you had any complications. Try to get as much rest as you can.

You are not alone. Ask your family or friends for help or support and talk to your GP or another health professional.

You can also contact these organisations for support and advice.

- **PANDA - Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia**

PANDA supports the mental health of parents and families during pregnancy and the first year after having a baby.
panda.org.au

- **Beyond Blue**

Visit the Beyond Blue website for helpful information on how to take care of your mental health as a parent.
beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/parenting

- **Australasian Birth Trauma Association**

Supports people, partners, and families after birth-related trauma. Their website has helpful resources and support.
birthtrauma.org.au

Future pregnancies and births

It's recommended to wait 18 months after your caesarean before having another baby, unless your doctor says otherwise. This means you can start trying to get pregnant again about 10 to 12 months after your baby is born.

In most cases, if this is your first caesarean birth you will have 2 options for your next birth. You can choose to:

- have a vaginal birth after caesarean (often referred to as VBAC, TOLAC or NBAC)
- plan another caesarean birth.

Your midwife and doctor can help you decide what's best for you based on your circumstances and wishes.

To learn more about your options after a caesarean, please read the Women's patient information 'My last birth was a caesarean: what are my options?'. This booklet was created with input from people like you to help make informed decisions. It includes important information about the benefits and drawbacks of each option.

You can find this booklet on the Women's website. thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#my-last-birth-was-a-caesarean-what-are-my-options

Follow-up appointment

Go to your GP for a check-up 6 weeks after giving birth, unless you've been told to go earlier. This appointment is for both you and your baby, so it's best to book a double appointment.

Resources

- My last birth was a caesarean: what are my options?
The Royal Women's Hospital
thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#my-last-birth-was-a-caesarean-what-are-my-options
- Birth after previous caesarean
The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (UK)
rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/birth-after-previous-caesarean
- Caesarean section
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
rancog.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Caesarean-Section.pdf
- Recovery after caesarean: first 6 weeks
Raising Children Network
raisingchildren.net.au/pregnancy/labour-birth/recovery-after-birth/after-caesarean#going-home-after-caesarean-birth
- Your health after birth
The Royal Women's Hospital
thewomens.org.au/health-information/pregnancy-and-birth/your-health-after-birth

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732

1800respect.org.au

Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.