



Once you make it through labor and delivery, visit KCParent.com to find out what baby's first 24 hours will be like.

What to Expect: C-Sections Vs. Vaginal Births

Birth Plan Considerations:

Write down and discuss your preferences with your physician and significant other.

Be flexible. Your baby's birth may not go specifically according to plan.

Avoid nonmedical-related pre-term delivery, especially before 39 weeks, which can put your baby's health at risk.

Determine who you can ask for support post delivery to avoid managing alone.

Following the birth of my son, I was disappointed that I had to undergo a c-section. Nonetheless, the feeling was fleeting as I held my newborn close, realizing the consequences could have been devastating if the surgery hadn't been performed.

Like many new moms, one of the first lessons I learned was that parenthood rarely goes according to plan. Since you don't know exactly how your child's birth will play out, manage some of the uncertainty now by learning the differences between cesarean and vaginal deliveries.

"Our ultimate goal is to have a healthy baby. However you get there, whether that be vaginal or c-section, we want moms to be happy and healthy and babies to be happy and healthy," says Dr. Kristen Wootton, ob/gyn, St. Luke's Hospital, Kansas City.

What is a c-section? A cesarean section is a major surgery requiring an incision through the abdomen and uterus. You will receive an epidural and, barring an emergency situation, you will be awake during the procedure. Depending on your specific situation, your physician will

make a low-transverse incision, which is a horizontal cut across the lower end of the uterus, generally preferred for better healing and less bleeding, or a vertical cut incision. Although you'll feel touch and tugging sensations, you shouldn't feel pain.

Why a c-section? According to the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of c-sections rose more than 33 percent between 2000 and 2007, declining slightly for the first time in 2010.

Dr. Ana Martinez, ob/gyn with Women's Health Associates who delivers babies at Shawnee Mission Medical Center and Menorah Medical Center, attributes the rise to a number of factors, including women's electing to have a c-section versus a vaginal birth, an increase in births of multiples (possibly due to higher rates of fertility treatments) and repeat c-sections for women who don't qualify or choose not to try a vaginal birth after c-section (VBAC).

Other reasons women may require a c-section include the baby's position in the uterus, the size of the baby, premature delivery, fetal heart rate changes indicating a lack of oxygen during labor or if there's a medical complication with the mother, like preeclampsia or gestational diabetes.

What about VBAC? "In the right situation, VBAC is a viable alternative, but it depends on why you had your first c-section," Martinez says. For example, if your previous c-section was due to your baby's being in a breech position, you might be an excellent candidate for VBAC. Your physician will also consider your risk for uterine rupture, your insurance requirements and the availability of an on-site physician during labor and delivery.

"Your doctor has to be available to get the baby out quickly," Martinez says. "If their office isn't on campus and a doctor can't be there the whole time, (VBAC) can be more risky."

Shawnee Mission has an OB hospitalist available 24-7 to assist patients. Hospitalists are on-site physicians who specialize in the care of hospitalized patients. St. Luke's has 24-hour anesthesia and in-house physician coverage for labor and delivery. Consult with your doctor to learn what type of coverage your hospital offers.

Risks. Tears and lacerations can occur during vaginal deliveries. Although rare, uterine rupture is a life threatening risk factor particularly for women who opt for a VBAC. A uterine rupture is a tear in the wall of the uterus, usually at the site of

a past c-section incision. The incidence rate is about 1 percent for women who have had low-transverse incisions, rising to 5 percent for women with vertical incisions. C-section risks include blood loss and complications with anesthesia, as well as scarring and adhesions.

Hospital stay. The typical hospital stay for a vaginal delivery is 24 to 48 hours, while a c-section is between three and four days.

Recovery. A woman who delivers vaginally has no restrictions on lifting and can typically return to her normal routine within a few weeks. With a c-section, expect the recovery to take a little longer as your mobility is more restricted.

"The first two weeks are the roughest," Martinez says. But, after that, most women are doing well and are off pain medication.

Other than your baby, you won't be able to lift anything over 10 pounds, and due to the pain medicines, you cannot drive for the first two weeks post surgery. However, breastfeeding is safe and encouraged. Lean on your spouse, a family member or a close friend for assistance, especially if you have other children.

"This is a time in your life when you need a little help, and it's okay to let go

of some of our innate control things as moms," Wootton says. "Let dads be active participants. Let them bring you changing stuff so you don't have to get up. People are always great to want to bring you food. Use those resources. An incision adds a little bit of a challenge to the mix, but it's definitely doable when you have good support."

And remember, even if your child's birth doesn't go exactly as planned, chances are the elation of holding your much-anticipated newborn will overcome any lingering feelings of disappointment.

"You can have the best birth plan... but there are just some things that are out of your control," says Jen Conrad, an Olathe mom of two. "Give yourself some grace and tell yourself you still did something amazing by bringing your sweet baby into this world—no matter how he or she arrives." As always, check with your health care provider with any questions or concerns.

Freelance journalist Christa Melnyk Hines resides in Olathe with her husband and two children, both delivered by c-section. Hines is the author of the ebook Confidently Connected: A Mom's Guide to a Satisfying Social Life.

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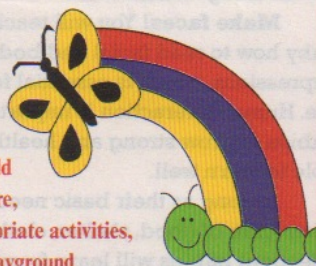
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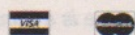
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