



**University Hospitals Bristol**  
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient Information Service  
**St Michael's Hospital**

## Top tips for recovery after a caesarean



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## **1. Getting help from your friends and family**

After any operation where your stomach is cut you will feel sore and tired and need time to recover. After a caesarean birth, not only do you have to recover from the operation but you have to cope with the challenges of being a new mother. If you have friends and family who can help it's well worth asking them to help out for a while with day to day tasks. If people come to visit, let them make their own cup of tea, and ask them to make you one at the same time.

## **2. Keep comfortable**

Remember to take your painkillers regularly when you get. We recommend that you have some paracetamol and ibuprofen (unless you are aware of any reason that you cannot take either of these) at home ready for when you leave hospital. After a caesarean birth, you may find loose clothing most comfortable, where elastic doesn't rest on top of your wound. Clothing that sits around your waistline rather than low down, or continue wearing your pregnancy clothes for a while longer. Anything that won't rub or press on your scar (and remember, it's not forever).

## **3. Getting moving**

It is important to keep mobile to help prevent a deep vein thrombosis (blood clot in the leg). Depending on your individual circumstances you may also be asked to wear special socks and have daily injections to help prevent thrombosis. Try to have a short walk around the house every two hours during the daytime. Gradually increase the distance you walk. Walking is an ideal exercise as you don't need to find a babysitter and you can walk faster and further as you feel stronger.

You may find it difficult to lift and carry your other children for a while too. Women often find it useful to sit down in a chair and get

their toddler to sit on their knee before standing up with them, or to get the toddler to stand on the second or third step of a staircase before lifting them.

## **4. Wound healing**

For the first 24 hours after your caesarean birth, you will have a dressing over your wound. The dressing is waterproof, so you can bath or shower as normal. If you are worried about the dressing or think it needs to be changed, please ask your midwife for advice. Once the dressing has been removed, keep the wound clean and dry. It is fine to use soap in the shower or bath as long as you pat the wound dry afterwards. You may notice itching at the wound site a week or so after the operation. It is part of the normal healing process and nothing to worry about. If however you notice redness, discharge or increasing soreness at the wound site, it can be a sign of infection. Contact your midwife or doctor if you are concerned.

A year or two after your operation, the scar will probably have faded to a faint line. It will always be a slightly different colour to your normal skin tone but may eventually be almost invisible. Some women regain a flat tummy after a caesarean birth, but it's common to have a bit of tummy overhang.

If you want to see what your scar may look like visit: [www.caesarean.org.uk](http://www.caesarean.org.uk), where you can see pictures of scars taken days, weeks, months or years after caesarean operations.

## **5. Driving**

You should avoid driving a car while you are recovering from your caesarean birth. For some women, this may be six weeks or longer. You might also find that some of the painkillers you are taking make you a bit drowsy or lightheaded which will make it unsafe for you to

drive. Please make sure you are well enough before you start driving and check that your insurance company is happy for you to drive.

## **6. Avoid constipation**

After a caesarean birth, it's important to ensure you open your bowels regularly and avoid any constipation. If you get constipated it can increase discomfort, especially around where your scar is. The best way to do this is to eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains and other foods high in fibre. Make sure you drink plenty of fluid. Where possible avoid the refined 'white' varieties of foods such as bread, rice and pasta and don't peel your fruit and vegetables. A good breakfast would be muesli with dried and fresh fruit or any other high fibre cereal such as Shredded Wheat, Weetabix, Oatibix or whole oat porridge. Adding a tablespoon of crushed linseed (Linusit) to your breakfast will also help and can be bought in many supermarkets. Using wholewheat bread, rice or pasta, plenty of fresh vegetables and fresh fruit will help your digestion. A healthy, fibre rich diet not only helps to keep your digestion regular but makes sure you get all the nutrients necessary to heal and recover after your caesarean birth.

## **7. Time to recover**

Try and take time to rest, and sleep while your baby is asleep. Vacuuming, carrying shopping and other strenuous jobs around the house should be put off if possible, and if you have people who can help you, let them! You may find doing some things is uncomfortable for up to six months after your caesarean.

## **8. Pelvic floor exercises**

Your pelvic floor muscles have been weakened from being pregnant so it is important to aim to do some pelvic floor exercises daily - for life. Aim for 10 second holds, 10 repetitions. Make sure to relax

thoroughly between repetitions. Then do 10 quick squeezes. Try to practice these exercises at least once a day. The best way to remember to do them is to link them with something you do daily (brushing teeth, having a shower or bath, watching TV). Ask your midwife or the physiotherapist if you need help getting these right.

## **9. Planning for the next baby**

It is important to discuss contraception with your midwife while they are visiting you, and with your doctor at your postnatal appointment. When planning your next baby, you are very likely to be able to achieve a vaginal birth after caesarean birth (VBAC). Seven or eight women out of every 10 who attempt VBAC have a vaginal birth. The likelihood rises to greater than eight out of every 10 if you have had a vaginal birth with a previous child before your caesarean birth. The type of birth that is best for you and your baby will be discussed in detail during your next pregnancy but it is very rare for a woman not to be able to plan a VBAC.

### **You can get further information from:**

[www.caesarean.org.uk](http://www.caesarean.org.uk)

#### **The National Childbirth Trust (NCT)**

0300 330 0700 [www.nct.org.uk/](http://www.nct.org.uk/)

**The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE)** have information for the public on caesarean section at

[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg132](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg132)

## **Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services**

0300 365 0663

[www.aims.org.uk](http://www.aims.org.uk)

They also publish a booklet called 'Birth After Caesarean'.

### **Notes**

Please note that if for any reason you would value a second opinion concerning your diagnosis or treatment, you are entirely within your rights to request this.

The first step would usually be to discuss this with the doctor or other lead clinician who is responsible for your care.

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death. For support in stopping smoking contact **NHS Smokefree on 0300 123 1044.**

As well as providing clinical care, our Trust has an important role in research. This allows us to discover new and improved ways of treating patients.

While under our care, you may be invited to take part in research. To find out more please visit:

[Redacted]

For access to other patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:

[Redacted]

**Hospital Switchboard:** [Redacted]



**Minicom:** [Redacted]



For an interpreter or signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



For this leaflet in large print or PDF format, please email [Redacted]

