

Cesarean Birth

Most babies enter the world through the *vagina*. But in about 1 in 3 cases, a baby is born by cesarean delivery. This means the baby is delivered through incisions (surgical cuts) in the belly and *uterus*.

This pamphlet explains

- why cesarean birth may be needed
- what it involves
- what happens after your baby is born

Reasons for a Cesarean Birth

There are many reasons why a cesarean birth may be used to deliver your baby. It may be the best approach for both you and your baby. A cesarean delivery may be planned in advance when certain conditions are known. Problems can also arise before or during labor that require cesarean birth. Many reasons are discussed below, and others are listed in the box "Other Possible Reasons for Cesarean Birth."

Sometimes a woman requests a cesarean delivery. This is a complex decision that should be carefully considered and discussed with an *obstetrician-gynecologist (ob-gyn)*.

Failure of Labor to Progress

About one third of cesarean births are done because labor slows down or stops. In these cases, contractions may not open the cervix enough for the baby to move into the vagina. The ob-gyn may start or speed up labor with medication if labor is moving slowly. It may be several hours before it's clear that a cesarean birth is needed.

Concern for the Baby

During labor, problems may be found and the baby may need to be delivered by cesarean birth. For example, the *umbilical cord* may become pinched or compressed. *Fetal monitoring* may detect an abnormal heart rate. If this problem continues, a cesarean birth may become necessary.

Multiple Pregnancy

Many women having twins are able to have a vaginal delivery. But if the babies are born too early, are not in good positions in the uterus, or if other problems are present, a cesarean birth may be needed. The chance of having a cesarean delivery goes up with the number of babies.

Problems With the Placenta

Placenta previa is a condition in which the *placenta* is below the baby and covers all or part of the cervix. This will block the baby's exit from the uterus. Another problem that may arise is placental abruption. This is when the placenta separates from the uterus before the baby is born and slows the flow of oxygen to the baby. Both of these conditions can cause heavy bleeding and require a cesarean birth.

Previous Cesarean Birth

Having had a cesarean birth before plays a part in whether you will need to have one again. If you have had a previous cesarean birth, you may be able to give birth vaginally.

The decision depends on the type of incision used in the previous cesarean delivery, the number of previous cesarean deliveries, whether you have any conditions that make a vaginal delivery risky, and the type of hospital in which you have your baby, as well as other factors. Talk with your ob-gyn about your options.

At the Mother's Request

Some women may request a cesarean delivery even if a vaginal delivery is an

option. Reasons for this request may include fear or anxiety about labor and delivery. This decision should be weighed carefully and discussed with your ob-gyn.

As with any surgery, there are risks to consider (read "Complications" below). Your hospital stay may be longer than with a vaginal birth. Also, the more cesarean births you have, the greater your risk for some medical problems and problems with future pregnancies. This may not be a good option if you want to have more children.

If you are considering cesarean delivery because you are afraid of the pain of childbirth, talk with your ob-gyn about pain-relief options. It may also help to learn all you can about the birth process. If you had a difficult birth experience in the past, talk with your ob-gyn about your concerns.

