

Everything You Need to Know About Planned Caesarean Sections



Highlights

An elective caesarean section is a planned procedure where the baby is delivered through a cut in the abdomen and uterus before you go into labour. The decision for an elective caesarean may be made for medical reasons or based on personal choice.

A caesarean section is a major surgery, so your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits, and you will need to sign a consent form.

A support person can usually be present during the operation.

Recovery after a caesarean usually takes longer than recovery from a vaginal birth, but your healthcare team will help you with breastfeeding and provide the necessary care.

In This Article

What Is an Elective Caesarean Section?

Why Choose a Planned Caesarean?

How to Get Ready for a Planned Caesarean

Steps to Take Before the Caesarean

Can I Have a Support Person With Me?

What Happens During and After the Procedure?

What Happens to My Baby During the Surgery?
What If I Go Into Labour Before the Scheduled Caesarean?
What to Do If You're Unsatisfied With Your Care?
Available Support and Resources

What Is an Elective Caesarean Section?

A caesarean section (C-section) is a surgical procedure where the baby is delivered through a cut in the abdomen and uterus. While caesarean sections can be performed in emergencies, a planned or elective caesarean is scheduled ahead of time. This may be due to medical reasons or personal preference.

Why Choose a Planned Caesarean?

A doctor may recommend a planned caesarean for several reasons, including:

Previous caesareans.

The baby is breech (bottom first) or transverse (lying sideways).

Multiple babies, with the first baby in a breech position.

Placenta previa, where the placenta covers part or all of the cervix.

Medical issues for the mother or baby.

Some mothers may also choose a caesarean for personal reasons, such as anxiety or a desire for more control over the birth. It's important to understand that a caesarean is major surgery, and this decision should be carefully considered.

How to Get Ready for a Planned Caesarean

Before the surgery, your doctor or midwife will schedule tests and reviews, explaining the procedure and what to expect. You'll need to sign a consent form.

The procedure is usually scheduled for 39 weeks but could happen earlier for medical reasons. Your doctor will discuss which anaesthetic (epidural or general anaesthetic) is best for you.

Pack a hospital bag for both yourself and your baby. If you wish to record the birth, ask your doctor if a support person can bring a camera.

Steps to Take Before the Caesarean

You'll be instructed to stop eating and drinking six hours before surgery. Your pubic hair may be shaved, and your abdomen cleaned with antiseptic. Compression stockings will be placed to reduce blood clot risks.

The anaesthetic will be administered, usually an epidural or spinal anaesthetic, which allows you to stay awake. An IV line will be inserted for fluids, and a catheter will be placed to collect urine.

Can I Have a Support Person With Me?

Typically, you can have one support person in the operating room. They will offer emotional support and assist with communication. If you are receiving a general anaesthetic, your support person won't be allowed in.

What Happens During and After the Procedure?

A screen will usually be placed to prevent you from seeing the surgery. In some cases, "maternal-assisted caesareans" may lower the screen briefly to allow you to see the birth.

After the baby is born, they will be handed to the midwife or paediatrician for a health check. If the baby is healthy, you or your partner can hold them immediately for skin-to-skin contact.

You will need time to recover, and help at home will be essential.

What Happens to My Baby During the Surgery?

The baby will be checked by the paediatrician or midwife immediately after birth. If the baby is healthy, they can be placed on you for skin-to-skin contact. If there are any concerns (e.g., breathing problems), the baby will receive medical attention.

What If I Go Into Labour Before the Scheduled Caesarean?

If you go into labour before your planned caesarean, contact your hospital's

maternity unit right away. About 1 in 10 women go into labour before their scheduled caesarean. In this case, an emergency caesarean will be performed.

What to Do If You're Unsatisfied With Your Care?

If you are unhappy with your care, speak with the head of your care team. Many hospitals have formal processes for handling complaints. Often, concerns can be resolved directly with the staff. If not, you can file a formal complaint with the relevant authority in your area.

Tools and Assistance

Pre-Surgery Guidance: Your healthcare team will provide detailed explanations of the procedure, potential risks, and your options. This is a good time to ask any questions you may have about the surgery and recovery.

Pain Management Options: Discuss pain relief options such as epidurals, spinal anaesthesia, or other medications with your doctor. They will help determine what works best for your situation and help you manage discomfort effectively.

Post-Surgery Recovery Tips: Make sure you follow the recovery guidelines given by your healthcare team, including recommendations on wound care, movement, and pain management.

Emotional Support: Reach out to support networks or a counsellor if you're feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about the surgery. Talking with others who have had a caesarean can also be a helpful way to share experiences and gather advice.

Hospital Resources: Hospitals often provide educational classes and one-on-one consultations to help you prepare for your caesarean and recovery. Check with your hospital about these services.

Breastfeeding Assistance: Many hospitals offer lactation consultants to assist with breastfeeding after the caesarean. They can help you find comfortable breastfeeding positions that minimize pressure on your incision.