

Having a caesarean section

Information for patients
and their family/carer



This booklet is designed to provide information for you if you are having a caesarean section.

It will help you to:

- Prepare yourself for surgery.
- Give you a general overview of your care before and after surgery.
- Inform family/friends of the expected course of events and the support you will need when you go home.

If you have any questions, please contact the midwifery staff at Flinders Medical Centre.

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What is a caesarean section?

Approximately 1 in 3 women will require a caesarean section to birth their baby.

A caesarean section is an operation where your baby is born through a surgical incision in your abdomen and uterus. This incision is usually made just above your pubic hair line.

Reasons for a planned caesarean section will be discussed with you during your antenatal appointments.

Some examples are:

- Previous caesarean sections
- Placenta praevia – where the placenta lies over the cervix
- A previous difficult vaginal birth.

The operation and anaesthesia will be explained to you by an obstetrician and anaesthetist prior to your caesarean section. Any potential complications from the caesarean or anaesthesia will be discussed with you. You are encouraged to ask questions at any time. You will be required to sign a consent form for both the operation and anaesthetic.

How to prepare for admission to hospital

After your caesarean section you will need to stay in hospital until you are medically fit to be discharged. To prepare for this it can be useful to arrange the following before admission:

- Childcare for your children at home
- Preparation of meals
- Some help for you and your family when you go home.

What to bring to hospital?

- Your orange pregnancy record
- Toiletries, including tissues
- Sanitary pads
- Breast pads
- Phone charger
- Your own pillow if you want
- Nappies for baby
- Clothing for baby.
- Comfortable casual clothes including:
 - Supportive maternity bra
 - Nightwear
 - Dressing gown and slippers
 - Underwear – for your comfort it is preferable not to wear bikini underpants as they may irritate your caesarean wound

We advise that no valuables be brought into the hospital, such as jewellery or large amounts of money.

Day of admission

The date and time of admission will be given to you in advance. Prior to admission you will be advised of where to present to at the hospital and from what time you will need to fast from foods and fluids.

- Please bring with you your orange pregnancy record and any medications
- Do not drink alcohol or smoke during the evening prior to your surgery or the day of surgery
- Shower prior to leaving home
- Remove nail polish from fingernails and toenails
- Remove all makeup, body piercings and jewellery (wedding ring excepted)
- Leave all bags in your car until you are transferred to the postnatal ward
- Accompanying support person must wear closed in shoes in the operating theatre.

Before your caesarean section

Once admitted to hospital the following will happen prior to your caesarean section:

- A history of your general health and your pregnancy will be taken
- Your observations will be recorded e.g., blood pressure, temperature, and baby's heartbeat
- A sample of your blood will be collected
- Medication may be given to you to lower the acid contents in your stomach
- You will be asked to change into a hospital gown and remove all other clothing
- If required, the midwife will clip your pubic hair
- A catheter will be inserted into your bladder to keep it empty during the operation.

In the operating theatre

- One support person may accompany you into the operating theatre. They will be given scrubs and a theatre hat to dress in. They must wear closed in shoes
- No filming is allowed in the operating theatre
- You will not be able to see the operation as a screen will be placed above your abdomen
- The anaesthetist will insert a catheter into a vein in your arm to administer fluids during the operation
- The anaesthetist will administer the anaesthesia.

Anaesthesia for caesarean section

During a caesarean section a regional anaesthesia is used for pain relief. A regional anaesthesia allows you to be awake for the birth of your baby. There are two differing types of regional anaesthesia, and your anaesthetist will discuss the best type of anaesthetic for you.

During the caesarean section you will feel sensations of gentle pulling and tugging, however you should not feel any pain. If you do experience any pain, you must tell the anaesthetist immediately.

Some women may require a general anaesthesia. During a general anaesthesia, medicines are used to send you to sleep. The anaesthetist will provide you with further information if you require a general anaesthesia.

If you have any questions or concerns about anaesthesia, you should discuss this with the anaesthetist.

Post-Operative Care

Pain relief

A caesarean section is a major surgery and without pain relief medications you will experience pain once the regional or general anaesthetic wears off.

To assist you to be able to care for yourself and your baby, you will be prescribed pain-relieving medications. All the recommended medications prescribed are commonly used by mothers who are breastfeeding. However, if you are breastfeeding and you or your baby become drowsy after taking these medications, please stop taking the medication and tell the midwifery staff. Please alert the midwifery staff if your pain relief is unsatisfactory or if you experience side effects such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, or itchiness.

Whilst in hospital all women are given a daily injection of Clexane to reduce the risk of blood clots.

Nutrition

Fluids will continue to be administered to you via the catheter in your arm until you are able to drink normally. Some women experience some nausea or vomiting after a caesarean section, and medication can be given to prevent this. The catheter in your arm will be removed when you are able to drink normally.

Midwifery staff will ask you if you have passed wind as this is an indication that your bowel is functioning normally. You will then be able to eat as desired.

Urinary catheter

The catheter in your bladder is usually removed the morning after the operation.

You should be able to pass urine without any discomfort. If you experience any discomfort or concerns, please alert the midwifery staff immediately.

Moving around and exercise

You will be encouraged to move around and get out of bed the morning after your caesarean section.

This will help to:

- Care for your baby
- Keep your blood circulating
- Keep your lungs healthy
- Exercise your abdominal muscles.

During pregnancy, hormones soften the ligaments and muscles throughout your body. This can make your joints and muscles more vulnerable to sprain and strain. This may continue for up to six months after the birth of your baby. A series of recommended postnatal and pelvic floor exercises are available in the *'Now that you have had your baby'* booklet.

Care of your baby

Unless your baby needs to go to the neonatal unit, they will remain with you. Having your baby remain will encourage maternal/infant bonding. Skin to skin contact with your baby is recommended and encouraged. Skin to skin contact encourages early breastfeeding. Your support person should be involved in caring for your baby. Midwives will be available to assist you, especially in the first few days.

Visiting hours

COVID-19 has resulted in varying restrictions on visiting times and visitor numbers. Please ask your midwife or contact Flinders Medical Centre closer to your caesarean section for visiting times and whether there are any restrictions.

Caesarean wound care

Stitches

Dissolvable stitches are commonly used in caesarean sections. These stitches do not need to be removed. However, sometimes non-dissolvable stitches, or staples may be used. These will need to be removed by the midwife prior to going home, or by the maternity outreach midwife, who will visit you at home.

Dressing

Your caesarean wound will be covered with a dressing immediately after surgery. Prior to going home this dressing will be removed and your wound assessed. A new waterproof dressing will be placed on the wound. You can shower with this dressing on. You will be provided with education on when to remove this dressing.

If you have a Prevena dressing, this will be removed by the maternity outreach midwife, who will visit you at home.

You must contact your general practitioner (GP) or the postnatal ward at Flinders Medical Centre if any of the following occur:

- Increased swelling or redness around the wound
- Increased pain
- Increased wound fluid.

An infected caesarean wound must be treated quickly. You may require antibiotics. Prompt treatment increases the chances of successful wound healing.

Emotional reactions

It is normal to feel anxious or frightened before any operation, but a caesarean section has the added concern of the effect of the operation on the wellbeing of your baby.

Some women feel a sense of relief after the operation, whilst others may experience disappointment at not having a vaginal birth. Whilst these feelings are normal it is important that you discuss these feelings with your partner, doctor, midwife, friend or a social worker.

Women can also feel confused and frustrated if they do not understand the reasons for needing a caesarean section. It is essential that you speak with a doctor and discuss this before leaving hospital.

Postnatal depression

Some women may experience 'baby blues' shortly after the birth of their baby. Experiences may include feeling anxious and fearful. One in five mothers who feel these feelings do not improve over time and they can develop postnatal depression within the first 12 months. Postnatal depression is a treatable condition but requires assistance to manage. Counselling and supportive therapy may all that is required; however, some women may require medication.

Symptoms to be aware of:

- Inability to sleep
- Decrease in interest, pleasure, or motivation
- Irritability
- Constant fatigue
- Change in appetite
- Anxiety
- Disinterest in your baby.

Please contact your GP should any of the above feelings be experienced or if you are concerned.

Alternatively further information/assistance can be found from the following services:

- **Helen Mayo House**
(Family Unit Glenside)
8303 1183
(24-hour counselling line)
- **Domestic Violence Helpline**
1800 800 098
(24-hour counselling service)
- **Flinders Medical Centre
Emergency Department**
8204 5511 and ask for the
Emergency Department
- **PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety
& Depression Australia)**
National Helpline 1300 726 306
(Mon-Sat)
[https://panda.org.au/get-support/
support-new-parents](https://panda.org.au/get-support/support-new-parents)
- **COPE**
[https://www.cope.org.au/new-
parents/postnatal-mental-health-
conditions/postnatal-depression/](https://www.cope.org.au/new-parents/postnatal-mental-health-conditions/postnatal-depression/)

Discharge home from hospital

Your stay in hospital will vary in length and depends upon your rate of recovery. You will be discharged when you are medically fit.

You may not feel fully recovered for some time and may find you tire easily at home. Accept offers of help from family and friends.

It is recommended that you do not drive your car for 4 to 6 weeks. Please check with your car insurance provider.

Avoid lifting anything heavier than 5kg.

Please notify your GP or the Flinders Medical Centre if:

- You feel like you have a fever
- Your vaginal blood loss increases or has an odour
- You suspect your caesarean wound may be infected
- You have increasing pain
- You are concerned about your mental health
- You are concerned about your baby.

Notes

Scan the QR code to access
this booklet online:



For more information

Women's and Children's Division
Flinders Medical Centre

Telephone: (08) 8204 5197

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/SALHN



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