

Vaginal Birth after Cesarean Section (VBAC)

The old saying “Once a Cesarean always a Cesarean” is **not always true**. The majority of women who have had a Cesarean, also called a C-section, can have a vaginal birth with their next pregnancy. The letters VBAC stand for “vaginal birth after cesarean.”

Why would I want a vaginal birth over a planned cesarean?

There are many benefits to the mother for a vaginal birth. These are:

- Faster recovery after birth
- Sense of accomplishment
- Breastfeeding is generally easier after a vaginal birth
- Reduces feelings of guilt that are sometimes associated with a cesarean
- Complications from surgery are prevented
- Less blood loss
- Decreased risk of infection
- Prevention of injury (bowel, urinary tract, etc.)
- Less likely to get blood clots in the legs, which can happen from any surgery
- Less anesthesia and pain medicine are needed
- Lower cost for a vaginal birth than a cesarean
- Maternal death is potentially lower with a vaginal birth than a cesarean

More on next page →

Learn more about your health care.

There are also benefits for the baby with a vaginal birth. These are:

- Less risk of early delivery
- Labor prepares the baby for life outside the womb
- Fewer breathing problems
- More opportunities for mother-baby bonding

How do I know if I can have a vaginal birth?

Talk with your doctor about your ability to have a vaginal birth.

- If you had a prior C-section and had a low transverse incision, you may be able to have a VBAC.
- If you previously had a cesarean because your baby was in either a breech position (feet first) or there were concerns about the baby's health during prior labor, you may be able to have a VBAC. For other reasons for which your prior cesarean was performed, talk with your doctor about your ability to have a VBAC.
- If you are willing to prepare for a VBAC and accept the risks of a VBAC you may be able to do so.

How do I know if I should have a repeat cesarean?

Talk with your doctor about concerns with a VBAC.

- Some women prefer a scheduled, repeat cesarean.
- Women with a vertical uterine incision **should not** have a VBAC.
- Scheduled repeated C-section reduces the risk of uterine rupture during an attempted VBAC which can potentially harm the mother and baby.

How can I prepare for a VBAC?

There are things you can do to prepare for a VBAC:

- Read about vaginal births after a cesarean so that you understand your options and know the statistics associated with VBAC and repeat cesarean delivery.

- Discuss the benefits and possibility of a VBAC with your health care provider.
 - ▶ Find out why you had a prior cesarean
 - ▶ Talk about a birth plan with your health care provider
 - ▶ Talk to others about their experiences with VBAC
- Prepare physically for a VBAC. Labor is the hardest work you will ever do. Exercise regularly and eat healthy foods.
- Take prenatal classes. Learn about the birthing experience.
 - ▶ Read about birth preparation.
 - ▶ Talk with your health care provider about prenatal education.
 - ▶ Contact the hospital where you are planning to deliver to register for a VBAC class, refresher course or other preparation for you and your partner.
- Believe in yourself, your body and the process of birth.
 - ▶ Be proactive and talk about pain medicine options during birth with your health care provider.
 - ▶ Confront any negative emotions you may have from the prior cesarean birth. Some women experience guilt or disappointment. Develop positive feelings about the birthing process.
 - ▶ Reassure family and friends about the safe decisions you are making for you and your baby.

Books and Resources for Cesarean and Vaginal Birth After Cesarean

There are many resources available to help you with your choice and planning of a VBAC. Here is a list of some resources which are available at your local library, bookstores, or hospital education centers.

- Birth After Cesarean by Dr. Bruce Flamm
- The VBAC Companion: The Expectant Mother's Guide to Vaginal Birth After Cesarean by Diana Korte
- www.acog.org for information about VBAC (from The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)