

Recovering from a Cesarean Birth

Tips on Healing

Cesarean birth is major abdominal surgery. New mothers need and deserve to have extra support during this special time of birth and healing. Women who have experienced either a planned or unplanned cesarean section react to the surgery in very individual ways. Some women physically heal very quickly, while others report that recovery took several weeks or even months. Avoid putting time limits on yourself. Emotionally, women's feelings about their cesarean sections vary in range from acceptance, to disappointment, to devastation. Some women need as much emotional support as physical support for a healthy recovery. Each woman heals and grows into her new role of motherhood at her own pace. In time, you will regain your energy level and sense of well being.

To Relieve Pain and Assist Physical Healing:

At Hospital:

- Ask for physical assistance, and keep nurses' call button within easy reach.
- Take pain medication as needed for comfort. Try to avoid pain medications containing codeine as they cause constipation, making it hard to void after cesarean surgery.
- If possible, obtain a private room so that a family member may remain with you.
- Use pillows to support your abdomen when turning, standing, coughing, and when feeding the baby.
- Rest as much as possible and limit visitors. Sleep when baby sleeps.
- Rock in a rocking chair as soon as possible after surgery -- to speed recovery and reduce gas.
- Take short walks.
- Eat nutritious food and drink plenty of fluids. Avoid cold and carbonated beverages.

The surgery will slow down your digestive tract, to help with constipation, try an over-the-counter stool softener, not a laxative.

Each time you stand after the surgery stretch up to uncramp stomach muscles and reduce adhesions.

At Home:

- Have several diapering stations so you can change baby easily.
- Let others do household chores like cooking, cleaning, and laundry.
- Check the incision daily, or have someone check it for redness, which can be a sign of infection.
- Have a list to things that need done, so when people ask, you can remember what needs done.
- Take care of yourself and your baby only.
- Remember not to lift anything heavier than your baby.
- Stay in your pajamas, so people remember you are recovering from birth and surgery.
- On the other hand, sometimes taking a shower and getting dressed really does wonders psychologically.
- Even in the hospital, it can help to put on your own clothes.
- Keep the baby near you at night so you do not have to get up.
- Have a basket that you can carry easily with nutritious snacks, fingernail clippers, lotion, a book and other little necessary things in it.
- Eat well and drink water freely. Have a pitcher of water or juice near you.
- If you have other children, secure assistance in caring for them from family and friends.
- Consider hiring a postpartum doula.
- Increase activity gradually. To Promote Emotional Healing:
- Keep your baby near you as much as possible and get to know your new baby.
- Breastfeed your baby to promote bonding and release beneficial mothering hormones.
- Share your feelings with others and talk about your experience as much as you feel necessary.

It is normal to experience a wide range of emotions including relief, happiness, sadness, anger and feelings of loss and failure.

Write your baby's birth story.

Write letters to the hospital and your doctor, explaining what you did and did not like about your birth -- you can mail them, or not, but it is beneficial to write your thoughts down.

Seek support from available resources including breastfeeding, parental and cesarean support groups.

Read books on natural childbirth, cesarean birth and vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC). There are many varied reasons why a birth may have ended in a cesarean section. If you plan to have any more children, it is important for you to know that it is very likely you can have a vaginal birth next time. When you are ready to learn about VBAC, ICAN can help you find the information and support you need. International Cesarean Awareness Network, 1304 Kingsdale Ave, Redondo Beach, CA 90278 (310)542-6400, email: info@ican-online.org or go to www.ican-online.org.

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