



Vaginal Birth After Cesarean Checklist

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One important aspect of preparing for a VBAC is to read pregnancy and vaginal birth after cesarean books. Two suggestions are: *The VBAC Companion* by Diana Korte and *Open Season* by Nancy Wainer Cohen.

Focus on proper nutrition and exercise. Make a daily checklist to ensure that you are getting essential nutrients. Engage in daily exercise such as swimming, walking, yoga, prenatal fitness classes—whatever feels comfortable and is approved by your provider beforehand. For information on diet throughout pregnancy, some good books are *What Every Pregnant Woman Should Know* by Dr. Tom Brewer and Gail Sforza Brewer or *The Brewer Diet*.

Register for VBAC specific courses in an independent prenatal program. These can be refresher courses if you have taken courses before. Even though you may have taken classes in a previous pregnancy, an evening out together with your partner will help to prepare you both by promoting discussion, giving you ideas on coping with labor, and increasing focus on this baby and its birth.

Enlist the encouragement of a supportive care provider. Find a caregiver/hospital who ALREADY provides the options you want. Find someone who believes in VBACs, has a VBAC success rate over 75%, and a cesarean rate that is lower than the community average. If possible, consider having a midwife as your primary caregiver. Midwives have a very low rate of cesarean birth. If you are unsure about anything, get a second opinion. Trust your inner strength and knowledge.

Hire a doula/labor assistant/support person. It is worth every penny to be reassured during labor by someone who believes birth is a natural function. This person will have supportive non-medical skills to help you through labor for the birth you want. This person will assist you from your first contractions at home right through postpartum. A labor assistant, or doula, takes the pressure off fathers and family members so that the whole family can be supported.

Throughout pregnancy, practice relaxation and visualization with exercises, tapes, massage, affirmations and touch. Use affirmations such as "each contraction strengthens my baby and me." Or "I will birth my baby vaginally, naturally, and joyfully."

Write a birth plan. Discuss everything that is important to you with your care provider, putting it all into your birth plan. Make extra copies to be put in your chart. Know your hospital's VBAC policies and negotiate well before the birth for anything different. Things to consider when writing your birth plan are:

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- The establishment of a safe, supportive birth environment to encourage labor.
- Trying a variety of positions. Instead of lying down, try standing or walking. Positions that do not involve lying on the back when pushing can be most effective. Try the birth ball. Try walking the halls. Try 'dancing' with your partner.
- Continue your calorie and fluid intake. Labor is work and takes energy. Far from eliminating the risk of aspiration with general anesthesia, total fasting (NPO) may increase the risk by raising the acidity of the stomach contents.
- Avoid medical intervention whenever possible. Continuous electronic fetal monitoring may restrict your movement. Ask for noninvasive options. Ask what will be done with the results.
- Artificial induction should be avoided, if possible. Medical induction is linked with high rupture rates and many interventions.
- Ask for time to try non-medical methods to stimulate labor if your labor is not progressing. These include change of position, walking, nipple stimulation, aromatherapy, or acupressure. Every labor is different. Unless you dilated to five or six centimeters during a previous labor, consider this one your first labor.
- Avoiding an epidural may increase your chance for a vaginal birth. An epidural interferes with the baby being optimally lined up and will reduce your ability to push effectively. Try natural pain relief measures, such as: hot/cold compresses, bath/shower (once labor is established), tens unit, massage, relaxation, guided imagery, or birth ball. If you start to think you really need an epidural, give yourself a few more contractions, or request that you be checked one more time. You may be moving quickly into transition without realizing it.

Note: Having a birth plan cannot guarantee that your wishes will be followed. Working with a provider who believes in birth is easier than fighting one who does not. No amount of demanding or asking nicely will get you the birth you want.

Many cesareans are done due to posterior or asynclitic presentation. To reduce your chance of this, try to avoid reclining positions prenatally. Read Val el Halta's informative article "Posterior Presentation - A Pain in the Back" and *Understanding and Teaching Optimal Fetal Positioning* by Jean Sutton and Pauline Scott.

Believe in yourself and the process of birth. Repeat affirmations to yourself constantly. Encourage yourself to believe that you are capable of delivering your baby vaginally. Get in touch with your inner self; your resources and abilities. Forget about your scar and focus on the positive aspects of your pregnancy.

Work on leftover negative emotions (guilt, disappointment, anger) from previous cesarean birth(s). Two helpful books for this are Lynn Madsen's *Rebounding From Childbirth*, and *Ended Beginnings* by Claudia Panuthos.



Learn to trust, cooperate with, and listen to your body and baby. Listen to your own unique labor pattern. Feel good about yourself and your relationship as a couple and try keep a positive outlook to reduce stress.

Enlist the support of family and friends. Remember that according to medical studies, VBAC is usually safer for both you and your baby than a repeat cesarean. Don't be afraid to let your family know how much you need their unconditional emotional support. If you are unable to receive support from friends and family, seek out support groups or individuals at your local ICAN chapter.

Attend VBAC support meetings and join national organizations like ICAN. Through meetings and newsletters, you will hear from others who have been there, sharing their VBAC experiences. Read *The VBAC Experience* by Lynn Baptisti Richards, a collection of VBAC stories.

Having a VBAC is worth it! You can do it. Not everything is within our control -- however, it is within all of us to prepare ourselves as best we can to maximize the chance of VBAC and our level of satisfaction with whatever birth outcome we may have.