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Recovering From A Cesarean: Tips on Healing

Reviewed and approved by Dr. Joyce Barrett, MD, from the ICAN Advisory Board

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Congratulations on the birth of your baby! While this is an exciting time for you and your family, a cesarean is major surgery and you may be feeling sore and tired. People who have experienced either a planned or an unplanned cesarean respond to the surgery in very different ways. Physically, some women heal very quickly while others report that recovery took weeks or months. A woman's feelings about her cesarean can range from acceptance and happiness to disappointment, depression or 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 and it is important not to put time limits on this process. In time, and with the needed support, you will regain your energy level and sense of well being.

Healing in the hospital:

- Ask for assistance when you need it and keep the nurse's call button within easy reach.
- If possible, obtain a private room so that a family member may remain with you.
- Ask your practitioner about postpartum pain and digestive medications.
- Pillows to support your stomach when turning, standing, coughing, and nursing may be helpful.
- Talk to your care provider about how much you should be resting and how much you should be walking around during your recovery.
- If you feel something is not right please don't hesitate to speak to your provider, seek a second opinion, and/or reach out to the hospital's patient advocate until you feel heard.
- If you are planning to breastfeed, talk to your nurse and lactation consultant about positioning that will be comfortable around your incision. While some experience a delay in their breast milk production after a cesarean, extra support can be helpful for a good start.



Healing at home:

- Try focusing mainly on taking care of yourself and your baby.
- Have a list of tasks ready for when people offer to help and don't be shy to ask people for help.
- Let others do household chores like cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Consider having frozen meals prepared.
- If you have other children, ask a family member or friend to help you with their daily routine.
- Consider enlisting the help of a postpartum doula or other support person for your recovery.
- Have several diapering areas so you can change your baby easily.
- Clothe yourself based on what you need. Staying in your pajamas can remind people that you are still recovering from birth and need extra help. On the other hand, taking a shower and getting dressed can help you feel refreshed and recharged.
- Fill a basket full of little useful things that you can carry with you. Items can include healthy snacks, your medications, a book, lotion, or a cordless phone.

Call your doctor if you have ANY concerns including but not limited to:

- Any bleeding in your incision.
- Unrelieved pain, or if the pain has increased.
- Pus, leaking, redness and swelling in your incision.
- Fever.
- Pain or cramping in your arms or legs, sudden swelling in the arm or leg, red or discolored skin, and skin that is warm to the touch.
- Continuous headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, or back pain
- Symptoms including tearfulness, anxiety, appetite changes, sleep problems, extreme fatigue, and difficulty focusing your thoughts.

Long-term healing:

- Share your feelings with others who understand how you feel and talk about your experience as much as you feel necessary. It is normal to experience a wide range of emotions.
- Write the story of your experience, with as much detail as possible when ready.
- Symptoms like tearfulness, anxiety, appetite changes, sleep problems, extreme fatigue, and difficulty focusing your thoughts, are important to be mindful of and speak to a healthcare provider about.
- Write letters to the hospital or your provider, explaining what you did and did not like about your birth experience. You can choose to not send them, or not, but it can be beneficial to write you thoughts down.
- Read books on natural childbirth, cesarean, and vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC). There are varied reasons why a birth may have ended in a cesarean. It is important to understand how it ended that way both for your own healing and understanding and for future births. It is



- important to understand that many women can go on to VBAC.
- Seek out the support of a local ICAN Chapter near you for education and support.