



## Recovering From A Cesarean: Tips on Healing

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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. New mothers like you need and deserve extra support during this special time of birth and healing. Women 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.
- Take pain medication as needed for comfort. Many mothers have found that narcotics (like codeine) can manage pain very well but can also cause constipation. Ask your doctor about using a stool softener.
- Use pillows to support your stomach when turning, standing, coughing, and nursing.
- Rest as much as possible and limit visitors. Sleep when the baby sleeps.
- When you are ready, take short walks to prevent blood clots. If you cannot walk have someone massage your legs and ankles in bed, and keep your feet raised on a pillow. Also consider using medical support leg hose to prevent clotting if you cannot move or have to travel within six weeks of the cesarean.
- Eat healthy food and drink plenty of fluids. Avoid soda and drinking with a straw since that can make you swallow air and cause gas.
- Remember to urinate at least every 3 to 4 hours. This helps avoid or reduce the bladder pain that some mothers have after the surgery.
- Rocking in a rocking chair after surgery may help speed recovery and reduce gas.
- If you are planning to breastfeed, talk to your nurse or a lactation consultant about positioning that will be comfortable around your incision. While some women experience a delay in their breast milk production after a cesarean, extra support will help you get a good start.
- When standing after surgery, stretch up to reduce cramped stomach muscles and potentially reduce adhesions.



### **Healing at home:**

- Take care of yourself and your baby only.
- Remember not to lift anything heavier than your baby for four to six weeks after surgery.
- 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. Have 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.
- Keep the baby near you at night so you do not have to get up.
- 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.
- Eat well and drink plenty of fluids. Have a pitcher of water or juice near you.
- Increase activity slowly. Listen to your body.

### **Call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:**

- Any bleeding in your incision. It can mean the surgical stitches have separated.
- Unrelieved pain, or if the pain has increased.
- Pus, leaking, redness and swelling in your incision, which can indicate an infection.
- A fever can also suggest an infection, most likely in your incision.
- Pain or cramping in your arms or legs that will not go away is a serious symptom and can suggest the presence of a blood clot. Other symptoms can include sudden swelling in the arm or leg, red or discolored skin, and skin that is warm to the touch.
- Continuous headaches, dizziness or back pain could suggest after-effects of the anesthesia used during surgery.
- Symptoms of postpartum depression can include tearfulness, anxiety, appetite changes, sleep problems, extreme fatigue, and difficulty focusing your thoughts, among others.



### **Long-term healing:**

- Keep your baby near you as much as possible.
- Breastfeeding your baby can promote bonding and release beneficial mothering hormones.
- Vitamin E capsules can improve the skin on the cesarean scar. Wait until the scar has healed, open a capsule, pour the oil on the scar and rub slowly.
- 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 of postpartum depression can include tearfulness, anxiety, appetite changes, sleep problems, extreme fatigue, and difficulty focusing your thoughts, among others. It's important to get the support you need to find healing.
- Write letters to the hospital or your provider, explaining what you did and did not like about your birth experience. You can choose to send them, or not, but it is beneficial to write your 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.