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Cesarean Delivery

Also called: C-section, Cesarean section

What is a cesarean delivery?

A cesarean delivery, also called a cesarean section or c-section, is surgery to deliver a baby. The baby is taken out through your abdomen (belly). In the United States, almost one in three babies are born this way. Some cesarean deliveries are planned. Others are emergency cesarean deliveries, which are done when **unexpected problems** [<https://medlineplus.gov/childbirthproblems.html>] happen during delivery.

When is a cesarean delivery needed?

You may need a cesarean delivery because:

- You have health problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthproblemsinpregnancy.html>] , including infection [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectionsandpregnancy.html>]
- You are carrying more than one baby [<https://medlineplus.gov/twinstripletsmultiplebirths.html>]
- Your baby is too big
- Your baby is in the wrong position
- Your baby's health is in danger
- Labor is not moving along as it should
- There are problems with your placenta (the organ that brings oxygen and nutrients to your baby)

Not everyone who has had a cesarean delivery before will need another one next time. You may be able to have a vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC). Talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

How is a cesarean delivery done?

Before the surgery, you will be given pain medicine. Depending on your circumstances, you might get:

- An epidural block, which numbs the lower part of the body through an injection in the spine.
- A spinal block, which numbs the lower part of the body through an injection directly into the spinal fluid.
- General anesthesia, which makes you unconscious during the surgery. This is often used during emergency cesarean deliveries.

During the surgery, the surgeon will:

- Make a cut in your abdomen and uterus. The cut is usually horizontal, but in some cases it may be vertical.
- Open the amniotic sac and take out your baby.
- Cut the umbilical cord and the placenta.
- Close the uterus and abdomen with stitches that will later dissolve.

What are the risks of a cesarean delivery?

A cesarean delivery is relatively safe for you and your baby. But it is still a major surgery, and it carries risks. They may include:

- Infection
- Blood loss [<https://medlineplus.gov/bleeding.html>]
- Blood clots [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodclots.html>] in the legs, pelvic organs, or lungs
- Injury to surrounding structures, such as the bowel or bladder
- A reaction [<https://medlineplus.gov/drugreactions.html>] to the medicines or anesthesia used

Some of these risks do also apply to a vaginal birth. But it does take longer to recover from a cesarean delivery than from a vaginal birth. And having a cesarean delivery can raise the risk of having difficulties with future pregnancies. The more cesarean deliveries you have, the more the risk goes up.

NIH: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Start Here

- **Cesarean Sections (C-Sections)** [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/c-sections.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/c-sections.html>]
- **Delivery by Cesarean Section** [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/delivery-beyond/pages/Delivery-by-Cesarean-Section.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/Spanish/ages-stages/prenatal/delivery-beyond/Paginas/delivery-by-cesarean-section.aspx>]
- **Having a C-Section** [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/birth/having-c-section>] (March of Dimes Foundation)
- **Labor and Delivery, Postpartum Care (Cesarean Delivery)** [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/c-section-recovery/art-20047310?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/c-section-recovery/art-20047310?p=1>]
- **What Is a C-Section?** [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/labor-delivery/topicinfo/c-section>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)

Related Issues

- **Breastfeeding after Cesarean Delivery** [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/pages/Breastfeeding-After-Cesarean-Delivery.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/ages-stages/baby/breastfeeding/paginas/breastfeeding-after-cesarean-delivery.aspx>]
- **Repeat C-Sections: Is There a Limit?** [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/c-section/expert-answers/c-sections/FAQ-20058380?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/tests-procedures/c-section/expert-answers/c-sections/faq-20058380?p=1>]
- **VBAC: Know the Pros and Cons** [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/vbac/art-20044869?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- **What Is Vaginal Birth after Cesarean (VBAC)?** [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/labor-delivery/topicinfo/vbac>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/labor-delivery/informacion/VBAC>]
- **Why at Least 39 Weeks Is Best for Your Baby** [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/birth/why-least-39-weeks-best-your-baby>]  (March of Dimes Foundation)


Specifics

- **Medical Reasons for a C-Section** [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/birth/medical-reasons-c-section>]
(March of Dimes Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://nacersano.marchofdimes.org/parto-y-nacimiento/cesarea-por-razones-medicas.aspx>]

Images

- **C-section - series** [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100191_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100191_1.htm]


Videos and Tutorials

- Cesarean section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000028.htm>]  (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/anatomyvideos/000028.htm>]

Statistics and Research

- FastStats: Births - Method of Delivery [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/delivery.htm>] (National Center for Health Statistics)
- PeriStats (Perinatal Statistics) [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/>] (March of Dimes Foundation)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Cesarean Section [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Cesarean+Section%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Evaluating the Role of Overactive Bladder Diagnosis in Predicting the Risk... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40717049>]
- Article: Evaluating a novel approach to placenta accreta spectrum management: the modified... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40670452>]
- Article: Esketamine prevents carboprost-induced adverse reactions during cesarean section under combined spinal-epidural... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40652217>]
- Cesarean Delivery -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Cesarean+Section%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- How to Find Find an Ob-Gyn [<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/find-an-ob-gyn>]
(American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
- March of Dimes Foundation [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/>]
Also in Spanish [<https://nacersano.marchofdimes.org/>]

Patient Handouts

- After a C-section - in the hospital [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000620.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000620.htm>]
- C-section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002911.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/002911.htm>]
- Going home after a C-section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000624.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000624.htm>]
- Vaginal birth after C-section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000589.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000589.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

After a C-section - in the hospital [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000620.htm>]

C-section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002911.htm>]

C-section - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100191_1.htm]

Cesarean section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000028.htm>]

Going home after a C-section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000624.htm>]

Vaginal birth after C-section [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000589.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Childbirth [<https://medlineplus.gov/childbirth.html>]

Childbirth Problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/childbirthproblems.html>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/cesareandelivery.html>] on *Cesarean Delivery*

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