

Birth options after previous caesarean section

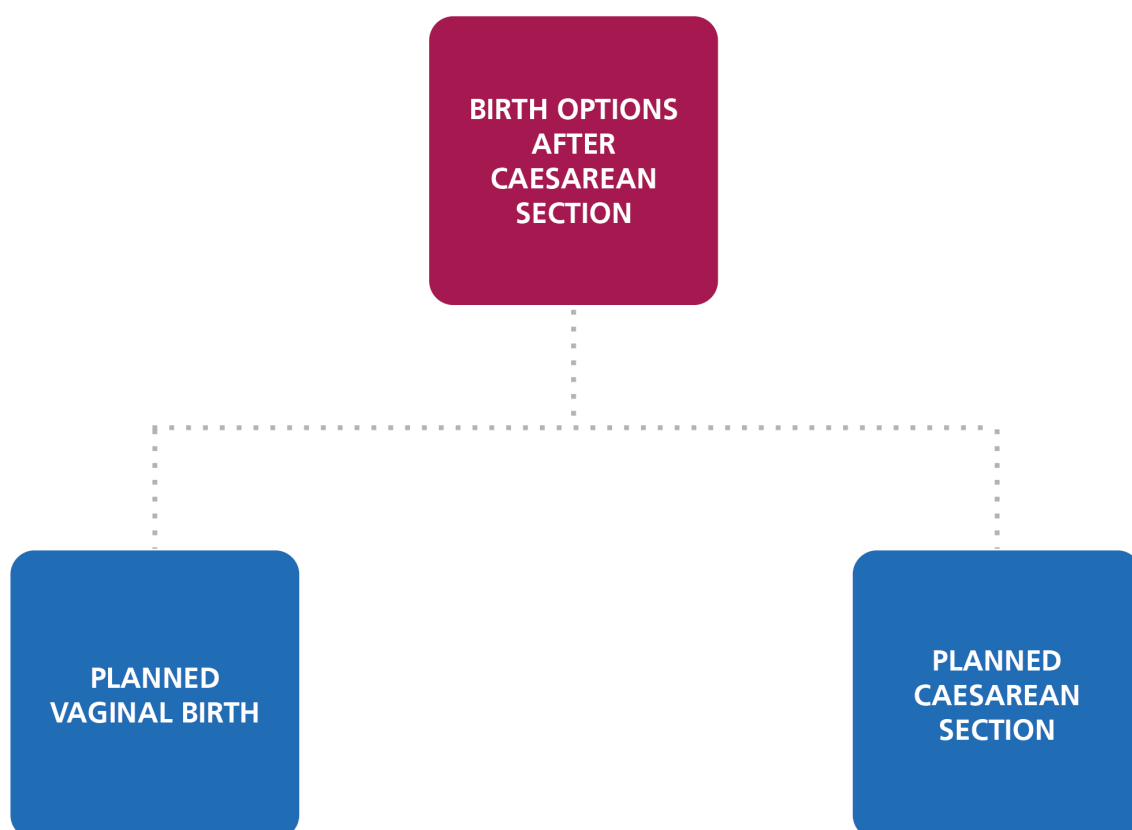
This short decision aid is for women who are pregnant with one baby, and have had one previous caesarean section. It will help you decide whether to have this baby delivered by a vaginal birth or a caesarean section. It is not designed for women who have had more than one previous caesarean section or are pregnant with more than one baby.

You can use it on your own, or with your doctor, to help you make a decision about what's right for you at this time.

Your decision may depend on many things, including questions or feelings about the relative safety of the options; the timing of your delivery; feelings about childbirth, pain, and recovery time; the effect on breastfeeding; and whether you want more children in future.

The main options for childbirth after one previous caesarean section are:

- Planning for a vaginal birth
- Planning for a caesarean section.



What are my options?

Treatment	What is it?
Planned caesarean section	A caesarean section is a surgical way of delivering a baby through a cut in the mother's abdomen. Most babies that are delivered by caesarean section are delivered through a horizontal (side-to-side) cut low on the mother's abdomen, called a 'low transverse' caesarean section. 25 in 100 babies in the UK are delivered by caesarean section.[1] In a repeat caesarean section, doctors will usually deliver the baby by cutting along the previous caesarean section scar.
Planned vaginal birth	If you previously had a caesarean section, you may be able to deliver your next baby vaginally. This is called 'vaginal birth after caesarean section'. You may hear other people refer to it as VBAC. You will need to have your baby in hospital, so both you and your baby can be monitored for problems during labour.

Treatment	What is the chance of having the type of birth you planned?
Planned caesarean section	<p>About 98 in 100 women who plan a repeat caesarean section are able to have one.[2] If a woman goes into labour before her caesarean section date, and labour is advanced by the time she reaches the hospital, it may be safer for the woman and her baby to continue with a vaginal delivery. A woman's obstetrician will discuss this fully with her.</p> <p>Around 10 in 100 women who plan a repeat caesarean section go into labour before their scheduled caesarean section date.[3] Unless a woman is in advanced labour, she should still be able to have a caesarean section if she wishes.</p>
Planned vaginal birth	<p>About 75 in 100 women who plan a vaginal birth after a caesarean section are able to have one.</p> <p>Difficulties with the pregnancy or during labour might mean that a woman needs to have a caesarean section.</p> <p>Around 25 in 100 women who choose a vaginal delivery will have an unplanned caesarean section during labour. A caesarean section will be performed if there is any immediate danger to a woman or her baby, or if her labour is not progressing as it should.</p>

Treatment	What is the chance of health problems for the baby?
Planned caesarean section	<p>The chance of a baby dying during or just after a planned repeat caesarean section is very small.[8]</p> <p>Some mature babies (babies born after 37 weeks) get a temporary breathing problem called respiratory distress syndrome (RDS). This happens to around 4 in 1,000 to 6 in 1,000 babies born by repeat caesarean section, and is limited by ensuring the caesarean section is booked for no earlier than the 39th week of pregnancy.[9]</p> <p>Transient tachypnoea is a condition where the baby breathes abnormally fast. About 36 in 1,000 babies delivered by caesarean section get transient tachypnoea.[10] It may happen if the baby is delivered before the 39th week of pregnancy. The condition is often treated by giving the baby oxygen or antibiotics. It is not life threatening and usually stops after a day or two. Babies with transient tachypnoea may need a short stay in a special care baby unit (SCBU) for observation.</p> <p>As with babies born by vaginal birth after a caesarean section, babies delivered by caesarean section may also have developmental delays.</p> <p>Between 7 in 1,000 and 31 in 1,000 babies are accidentally cut by the doctor during caesarean delivery. This is more likely during an unplanned caesarean section (when the waters have gone) than during a planned caesarean section.[11] The cuts can occasionally leave scars. We don't know if a previous caesarean section makes it more or less likely that a baby will be accidentally cut during a caesarean delivery.</p>
Planned vaginal birth	<p>The chance of a baby dying during or after a planned vaginal birth after a caesarean section is very small.[4] The chance of a baby dying are about the same as the chance of that happening during a vaginal birth when a woman gives birth for the first time.</p> <p>Some mature babies (babies born after 37 weeks) get a temporary breathing problem called respiratory distress syndrome (RDS). This happens to fewer than 1 in 1,000 babies born by vaginal births after caesarean section.[5]</p> <p>Transient tachypnoea is a condition where the baby breathes abnormally fast. About 26 in 1,000 babies delivered vaginally get transient tachypnoea.[6] It may happen if the baby is delivered before the 39th week of pregnancy. The condition is often treated by giving the baby oxygen or antibiotics. It is not life threatening and usually stops after a day or two. Babies with transient tachypnoea may need a short stay in a special care baby unit (SCBU) for observation.</p> <p>Some babies born by vaginal birth after a caesarean section don't get enough oxygen to their brain during delivery. This happens to fewer than 1 in 1,000 babies.[7] This may have long-lasting effects on the health of the baby, including developmental delay, where the child doesn't develop as quickly as other children.</p>

Treatment	What is the chance of health problems for the mother?
Planned caesarean section	<p>In the UK it's very rare for a woman to die during childbirth, or from problems related to childbirth. Overall, the numbers are 7 in 100,000 births.[21] The difference between deaths after a planned caesarean section and deaths after a vaginal birth is small enough to be down to chance.[22]</p> <p>Fewer than 1 in 1,000 women having a repeat caesarean section have a uterine tear. [23] Hospitals nowadays are well equipped to deal with uterine tears, if this happens. If a woman's uterus can be repaired, she can have more children. Her doctor will probably recommend a planned caesarean section for her next delivery. Sometimes, the uterine tear cannot be safely repaired and a hysterectomy (surgical removal of the womb) is needed.</p> <p>About 8 in 1,000 women who plan a repeat caesarean section have severe bleeding, in some cases requiring a blood transfusion.[24]</p> <p>An emergency hysterectomy may be performed to control life-threatening bleeding. Between 2 in 1,000 and 3 in 1,000 women who have a second caesarean section need a hysterectomy.[25]</p> <p>The chance of having a life-threatening blood clot (thromboembolism) that blocks a major blood vessel is less than 1 in 1,000.[26]</p> <p>Endometritis (an infection of the lining of the womb) occurs in nearly 2 in 100 women who have a planned repeat caesarean section.[27] The condition is treated with antibiotics and usually clears up within one week. Women having a caesarean section are generally given antibiotics when the caesarean section is being carried out.</p> <p>Having several pregnancies increases a woman's chances of getting stress incontinence. Stress incontinence usually improves within a few weeks of giving birth, but sometimes lasts for several months. About 7 in 100 women who have a caesarean section get stress incontinence (where urine leaks while coughing, laughing, sneezing, or exercising).[28] A caesarean section operation won't cause stress incontinence, but being pregnant might.</p> <p>About 9 in 100 women experience continuous wound and abdominal discomfort in the first few months after surgery.[29]</p>
Planned vaginal birth	<p>In the UK it's very rare for a woman to die during childbirth, or from problems related to childbirth. Overall, the numbers are 7 in 100,000 births.[12] The difference between deaths after a planned caesarean section and deaths after a vaginal birth is small enough to be down to chance.[13]</p> <p>Around 2 in 1,000 women having a vaginal birth after caesarean section have a uterine tear. [14] Women have a higher chance of uterine tear if labour is induced or they give birth less than 12 months after their previous birth (caesarean section). Hospitals nowadays are well equipped to deal with uterine tears, if this happens. If a woman's uterus can be repaired, she can have more children. Her doctor will probably recommend a planned caesarean section for her next delivery. Sometimes, the uterine tear cannot be safely repaired and a hysterectomy (surgical removal of the womb) is needed.</p> <p>About 23 in 1,000 women who plan a vaginal delivery after a caesarean section have severe bleeding, in some cases requiring a blood transfusion.[15]</p> <p>An emergency hysterectomy may be performed to control life-threatening bleeding. Between 2 in 1,000 and 3 in 1,000 women who have a vaginal delivery after caesarean section need a hysterectomy.[16]</p> <p>The chance of having a life-threatening blood clot (thromboembolism) that blocks a major blood vessel is less than 1 in 1,000.[17]</p> <p>Endometritis (an infection of the lining of the womb) occurs in nearly 3 in 100 women who have a planned vaginal birth after a caesarean section.[18] The condition is treated with antibiotics, and in 90 in 100 cases it clears up within three to four days.[19]</p> <p>Having several pregnancies increases a woman's chances of getting stress incontinence. Stress incontinence usually improves within a few weeks of giving birth but it sometimes lasts for several months. About 12 in 100 women who have a vaginal birth get stress incontinence (where urine leaks while coughing, laughing, sneezing, or exercising).[20]</p>

Treatment	What is the effect on what you can do after the birth?
Planned caesarean section	<p>Women can hold and breastfeed their baby immediately after a planned caesarean section.</p> <p>Women usually stay in hospital for two to four days after a planned caesarean section, although it is possible to leave the hospital 24 hours after giving birth if a woman arranges follow-up care at home.</p> <p>Babies are given a thorough check (neonatal examination) by a nurse, midwife, or doctor within 48 hours of being born. Afterwards, both mother and baby can usually go home.</p> <p>If a mother or her baby is unwell they may have to stay in hospital longer. Recovery after a caesarean section varies from person to person. A woman's age and health (before childbirth) will affect how quickly she recovers.</p> <p>It can take four to six weeks to fully recover from a caesarean section. While the wound is healing, a woman should not drive, do strenuous exercise or household chores, lift anything heavier than her baby, or have sex. A woman can start doing these things again once she feels able to do them, and when they do not cause pain. For some women this may be in a few weeks. For others it may be longer.</p> <p>Some women have abdominal pain following a caesarean section. The pain from the caesarean section wound may last six to eight weeks.</p>
Planned vaginal birth	<p>Women can hold and breastfeed their baby immediately after a vaginal birth. Some pain medication (analgesics), such as pethidine, can make a baby sleepy and affect his or her sucking reflex, making breastfeeding more difficult. The effects can last for several days.</p> <p>Women usually stay in hospital for one to two days after a planned vaginal birth.</p> <p>Babies are given a thorough check (neonatal examination) by a nurse, midwife, or doctor within 48 hours of being born. This may be in hospital or at a woman's home if she has been discharged. If a woman is still in hospital, she and her baby can both go home after the baby has been examined.</p> <p>If a mother or her baby is unwell they may have to stay in hospital longer. Recovery after a vaginal delivery varies from person to person. A woman's age and health (before childbirth) will affect how quickly she recovers.</p> <p>Recovery from a vaginal delivery will take a few days. If a woman had stitches or other problems, recovery could take several weeks. Women should be able to get back to their normal activities, including looking after other children, driving, and normal social activities, as soon as they feel well enough.</p>

Treatment	What is the effect on choosing future childbirth options?
Planned caesarean section	<p>If a woman chooses a caesarean section, her chance of having a successful vaginal birth in future may be lower. The problems associated with a planned vaginal delivery may be different if a woman has had more than one previous caesarean section.</p> <p>Having multiple caesarean sections may increase the chance that a woman will have problems in future with her placenta not separating properly during delivery. (The placenta is the organ that provides a baby with oxygen and food while in the womb.) This is called placenta accreta and it can cause more-than-normal bleeding during birth. A hysterectomy may be needed if the bleeding doesn't stop. This is a last resort.</p>
Planned vaginal birth	<p>Women who choose a vaginal birth are likely to be able to choose either another vaginal birth or a planned caesarean section in future pregnancies.</p> <p>If a woman has a successful vaginal birth this time, her chance of having a successful vaginal birth in the future with a straightforward recovery will be higher. About 94 in 100 women who have a successful vaginal birth after a caesarean section have a successful second vaginal birth.[30]</p> <p>If a woman has an assisted vaginal delivery (with forceps or ventouse), the chance that she will need an assisted delivery next time will be much lower. Having an unplanned caesarean section or changing to a planned caesarean section may affect a woman's chances of having a vaginal birth next time.</p>

What are the pros and cons of each option?

People who have to decide whether to plan for a vaginal birth or another caesarean section after a previous caesarean section have different experiences about the associated problems and views on approach. Choosing the option that is best for the patient means considering how the consequences of each option will affect their life.

Here are some questions people may want to consider when deciding whether to plan for a vaginal birth or another caesarean section:

- Is having the type of birth they planned very important to them?
- Is reducing pain as much as possible very important to them?
- Is it very important to them to leave hospital shortly after giving birth?
- Do they want to get back to everyday activity as soon after childbirth as possible?
- Is lowering their chance of becoming incontinent very important to them?
- Do they want to be able to have more children?
- Do they want to be able to choose the type of delivery they have in future?
- Do they want to minimise harm to their baby and themselves?
- Is it very important that they can hold and breastfeed their baby straight after it is born?