

## Women and Children's

# Caring for your caesarean section wound

A caesarean section, or C-section, is a major operation where a surgical incision is made to gain access to your uterus. The incision is made through 5 layers: skin, fat, muscle, peritoneum, womb.

Because of this, it takes longer to recover from a C-section than a vaginal birth. Usually, recovery takes around 6 weeks. The outer skin edges of the wound usually heal after a few days, but the internal healing of the other layers will take several months.

## What to expect after a caesarean

### Surgical wound

The surgical wound is a 10 to 20cm cut made across your lower stomach, along the bikini line. In most cases, dissolvable stitches are used, so there is no need to remove these. Sometimes non-dissolvable stitches are used, which will be removed by a midwife or nurse.

### Pain

As with any cut to the skin, you are likely to have pain. Even small movements such as moving in bed and coughing can be sore. This can last for a few weeks.

Pain can usually be well controlled with paracetamol and ibuprofen. Do not take your own pain relief whilst in hospital. Speak to your midwife or doctor/GP if your pain is not well controlled.



## Patient Information

### Vaginal bleeding and discharge

Vaginal bleeding and discharge are normal after a C-section. Your uterus is shedding the thick lining it forms during pregnancy. Bleeding can continue for up to 6 weeks but should lessen over time.

You may need to change your sanitary towel every few hours for the first couple of days. You should not be saturating a pad within an hour at any point. Speak to your midwife if you are concerned about your bleeding.

If you have been discharged from hospital and are concerned about bleeding, please call labour ward triage. Call 999 if the bleeding is excessive.

### Wound dressing

You will have a waterproof dressing placed over your wound at the end of your surgery. This will remain in place for 48 hours **unless** you have a PICO dressing.

You may need another dressing applied after this 48-hour period if there is any leakage from the wound, or if we think you have an infection. Your midwife will discuss this with you.

### To care for your wound

#### Do:

- ✓ Avoid touching your wound. If you need to touch your wound or dressing, thoroughly wash your hands before and after.
- ✓ Keep your skin clean.
- ✓ Wash your wound daily with plain water.
- ✓ Take showers rather than baths.
- ✓ After showering, pat the wound dry with a **clean** towel that is separate from the one you use to dry the rest of your body. Also, take a few minutes to lie down and allow the wound to air dry if you can.

## Patient Information

- ✓ Wear loose, comfortable clothing. You'll need several pairs of large disposable maternity pants or cotton equivalent that will cover the wound and not cause irritation.
- ✓ Support your wound when coughing, laughing or when making sudden movements. You can use a rolled up clean towel to do this - place the towel over your wound and apply light pressure.

### **Do not:**

- × Do not pull your stitches. The end of a dissolvable stitch may poke through your skin where the knot has been tied. This will come away naturally.
- × Do not rub or massage your wound while it is healing.
- × Do not apply any soaps, oils, or talc directly to your wound while it is healing.
- × Do not submerge your wound in water.
- × Do not wear tight underwear or clothing where the banding is pressing on your wound.

## **PICO dressings**

PICO dressings are used if your surgeon feels you have an increased risk of wound infection. PICO dressings place the two sides of the wound under pressure to decrease tension on the wound, remove moisture and increase blood flow to the wound. This helps to prevent infections.

You will go home with the PICO dressing still in place, and a midwife will remove it after 7 to 10 days.

The PICO box attached to the dressing is not waterproof. You must disconnect it before showering by unscrewing it from the clear tubing and placing it in a safe place. After showering, reconnect it and press the orange button to turn it back on.

### **Risks of getting a wound infection**

There are several risk factors that can put you at a greater risk of a C-section wound infection, including:

- being overweight
- smoking
- diabetes
- poor diet

### **To reduce the risk of getting a wound infection:**

- Eat a balanced healthy diet and drink plenty of fluids. A diet high in protein will help with wound healing.
- If you smoke, try to give up before your surgery. You can get support with this from your GP.
  - If you have diabetes, it is important that your blood sugar levels are well controlled. High blood sugar levels can slow down wound healing and increase the risk of wound infection.
- On the day of your operation, take a shower before your C-section.
- Do not shave your bikini line before your surgery – doing so yourself can increase your risk of infection. The theatre team will use ‘clippers’ before your surgery if needed.
- After surgery, get plenty of rest.
- Avoid driving or lifting anything heavier than your baby for 6 weeks.

### **Signs of infection**

The signs of infection include:

- increasing wound pain
- redness, heat or swelling around the wound
- an unpleasant smell coming from the wound
- your wound starts leaking yellow or green discharge or pus
- your wound is gaping or opening
- you start feel unwell, feverish or have a high temperature

## Patient Information

Look out for the signs of infection. If you suspect you have a wound infection or are concerned, speak to your midwife or doctor/GP as soon as possible.

Make sure you take your full course of antibiotics, even if you think your wound has improved or you start to feel better.

## More information

[Recovery Choices, Five Guide, Enhancing C-Section Recovery \(fiveguidecsectionrecovery.com\)](https://fiveguidecsectionrecovery.com)

[Caesarean section - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

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