



Waitemata
District Health Board

Best Care for Everyone



After your caesarean section

Information to help your recovery from your caesarean birth.

What to expect in hospital

In the recovery room

After the operation you will transfer to the recovery room where you will be closely observed for about an hour before being moved to a room in the maternity ward.

As soon as you feel able, we encourage you to cuddle your baby skin-to-skin, this helps regulate their temperature and breathing. Usually your baby will be ready to breastfeed within the first hour after birth; the staff will assist you.

In the maternity ward

The postnatal stay is usually 3–5 days after a caesarean, but you may go home or transfer to a facility closer to home sooner if you are well enough.

When you first arrive in the ward you will have a drip in your arm, a catheter (tube) to empty your bladder and a pump with a button that you can give yourself pain relief as you need it. These will be removed as you recover over the next 12–24 hours.

You may start to drink sips of water straight away, then slowly build up to eating normally. If you feel sick, stop and let your midwife know.

Your baby will be in the cot next to your bed; you can bring baby into bed with you for feeding and cuddles, but make sure someone is with you at first as you must be careful not to fall asleep with baby in bed. Once you are more mobile usually after 8 hours you can continue to do more for your baby yourself.

What to expect from your body

Feeling emotional

After your caesarean, you may feel upset, particularly if the caesarean was not planned. You may be concerned about your baby, particularly if they are unwell. These are normal emotions to have; it is common to get flashbacks, intense dreams, and to cry without warning. This is because your hormones are changing rapidly.

Rest as much as possible, and when you are ready talk things through with your Lead Maternity Carer (LMC). Feel free to ask any questions and make sure you understand what happened and why.

You may find it difficult to remember things in the first few days, so ask your support people to assist, and write things down if this helps. Most commonly these feelings pass and you can enjoy being a mum to your new baby, but if they continue after you go home, talk to your LMC as there are services that can help.

Pain

It is important for your recovery to remain as pain free as possible, so that you can move around easily. If the pain is preventing you from moving let staff know, as there are additional medicines that can be given. It is usual to continue to take mild pain relief like paracetamol for the first few weeks after a caesarean.



TIP: Support your wound with your hands or a pillow when you cough, sneeze or laugh.

Difficulty moving

Moving around is an important part of your recovery as it reduces the chance of complications like blood clots, pressure sores and chest infections.

When resting in bed move your feet up and down and make complete circles with your feet from the ankle. This will help circulation in your legs.

Take slow deep breaths right down to your tummy and as you let each breath out relax fully; this will expand your lungs and increase oxygen to your body.

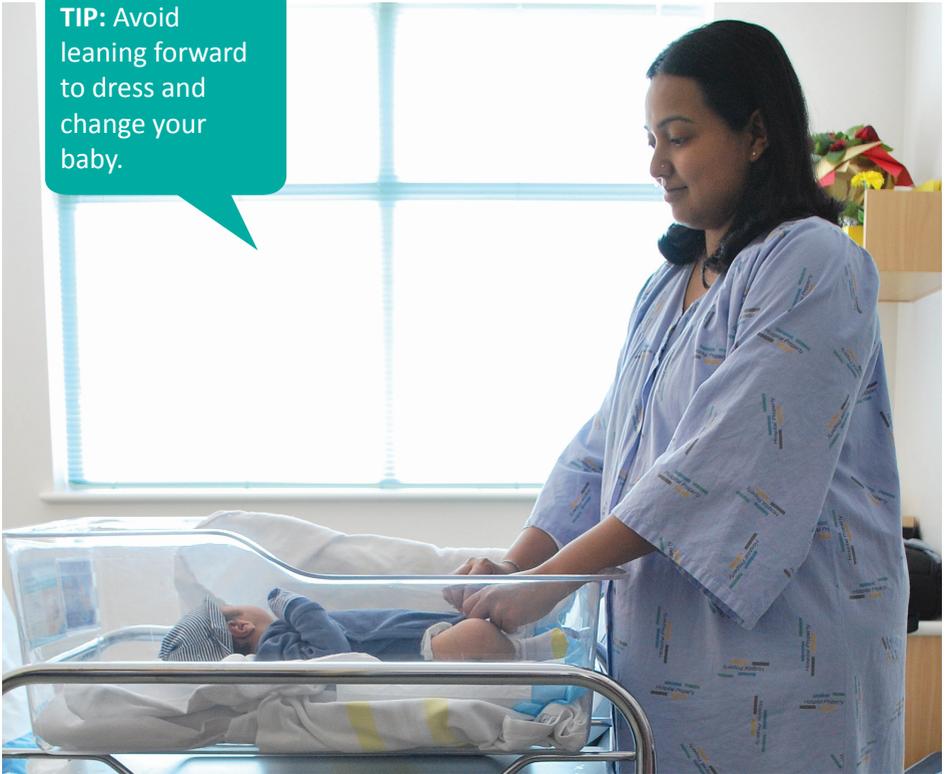
Staff will assist you to get out of bed and start moving around within the first 12 hours after your surgery. Do not attempt to get out of bed without support for the first couple of times, until you are confident that you are not going to faint.

Follow these instructions when getting out of bed:

- Brace your lower abdominal muscles. Roll onto your side with knees together and lower your feet off the bed, push up with your hands.
- Don't pull yourself up on the bedrails, or thrust forward.
- Once you are sitting, move to the edge of the chair or bed. Keep your feet apart and lean forwards. Stand up by pushing the ground away, bracing your abdominal muscles as you do this.
- Stand tall, with a natural curve in your spine. Relax your shoulders and gently tuck your tummy in.

Once you feel able, take regular short walks up and down the corridor.

TIP: Avoid leaning forward to dress and change your baby.



Going to the toilet

Once the catheter (tube) in your bladder has been removed you should be able to go to the toilet normally. Let your midwife know if you are having difficulty passing urine or feel constipated. When on the toilet:

- Sit straight leaning forward with your feet and knees apart
- Bend forward from your hips to rest your forearms on your knees
- Relax your tummy muscles and support the wound with your hand if uncomfortable.



If you are having problems passing urine or have concerns please talk to your midwife.

Caesarean wound

Your caesarean wound is usually on your lower tummy, and is likely to feel very tender. Support your wound with your hand if you want to laugh or cough.

The doctors use different types of stitches, often dissolvable, but sometimes beads or metal clips; which are removed after 5-7-days. A dressing will be covering your wound and will remain on for several days, let the staff know if you notice any staining or bleeding on your dressing.

After the dressing is removed you should wash and soap the wound daily to keep it clean, and pat it dry with a towel.

The scar generally heals well to a pale white line or raised pink line (it depends how your skin normally heals).



If your wound becomes hot, has red areas, smells unpleasant, or you have a temperature above 38°C you may have an infection. Please let staff or your LMC know immediately.

Bleeding

It is usual to have period like bleeding for up to 6-weeks after the caesarean. Only use pads not tampons during this time. As your uterus goes back to its normal size, the bleeding slows and finally stops. If you have been up and very active, the bleeding may become heavy again, this will slow again when you rest.



If the blood has a bad smell, is very heavy again after being light, you pass clots of blood, or you have a temperature above 38°C. Please let staff or your LMC know immediately.

At home

Recovery

It takes at least 6 weeks to recover from a caesarean. It is important that you get rest when your baby is sleeping to give your body time to heal. This is never easy with a new baby, but get help from friends and relatives. Help yourself by making time every day for a sleep. If you feel tired or sore you need to rest.

Once you are eating normally, make sure you eat healthy foods that are high in iron to treat anaemia, and protein for tissue repair. If your iron stores were low before your caesarean you may need iron tablets.

Lifting

You should not lift anything heavier than the weight of your baby in the first 6 weeks. Start with light housework such as cooking and dishes, and let people help you with anything too heavy.

Return to exercise

Pelvic floor exercises are especially important in the first few months for all women after pregnancy, regardless of the type of birth. Continue to do pelvic floor exercises daily for life.

Go for a daily walk – start with 5 minutes, then increase by an extra 5 minutes each day, as comfortable with your wound. You can start a simple exercise programme after 6 weeks, but stop if you have any pain. If you are attending a class let the instructor know that you have had surgery.

Driving

The surgery damages your abdominal muscles and leaves them weak, making it difficult to stop the car in an emergency. As a guide, before you start driving, you must be able to sit and turn your body to look over your shoulder without pain and brake suddenly.

You are advised to avoid driving for the first 6 weeks following surgery. Before driving, check with your insurance company that your policy will cover you.

When to alert my LMC or Doctor

If you have any of the following symptoms contact your LMC or Doctor:

- Temperature over 38°C
- Increased pain in your tummy or on your wound, such as:
 - tenderness to touch
 - burning sensation
 - redness
 - discharge or ooze from your wound
- Smelly vaginal discharge
- Extremely heavy bleeding that soaks a maxi pad within an hour, or the passing of large clots
- Swollen, red, painful area in the leg
- Burning sensation or pain when passing urine
- Unable to pass urine or constipation

Future pregnancies?

Because you have had a caesarean birth this time, does not mean you will have to have a caesarean section for future births. Speak to your LMC or the specialist who performed the surgery for advice on whether a vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC) will be an option for next time.

Further information

Your LMC will be able to give you more information about recovering from your caesarean, guidance for future pregnancies.

The following organisations can offer support and information for women after a caesarean birth:

- **Parents Centre:** Ph 09-837 8481
www.parentscentre.org.nz
- **Le Leche League (breastfeeding support):**
www.lalecheleague.org
- **TABS (Trauma and birth stress):** Ph 0832 4 TABS
www.tabs.org.nz
- **Parent Aid West Auckland (Waitakere):** Ph 09-836 4122
www.parentaidwaitakere.co.nz
- **Parent Support (North Shore):** Ph 09-486 4666
- **Hibiscus Coast Family Services:** Ph 09-424 4584
www.hbcfamilyservices.co.nz
- **Parent Aid North West (Kumeu to Glorit):** Ph 09-420 7002
www.parentaidnorthwest.org.nz
- **Homebuilders Family Services (North Rodney):** Ph 09-425 7048
www.homebuildersfs.org



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