

Mode of birth



Having a safe delivery

Make sure you discuss your delivery options with your doctor well before your expected delivery date. Most babies are born vaginally, which is why this is typically referred to as a “natural” birth. Under some circumstances, your doctor may recommend or suggest a Cesarean section (C-section) which requires a surgical cut into your belly and uterus to extract your baby. Increasingly, some doctors are recommending C-sections because they are easier to schedule, and some are even presenting C-sections as merely an alternative option to natural birth. This has been a controversial discussion in medical circles. Let’s take a look at the two delivery methods.

Vaginal birth

During labor, the uterus contracts regularly to thin (efface) and open (dilate) the cervix and push the baby out through the birth canal. Most women with no risk factors for problems during labor or delivery have their babies vaginally.

C-section

A C-section may be medically necessary for several reasons. In advance of your due date, your doctor may recommend a C-section because of developing complications that suggest planning for one:¹

- You’ve had a C-section in the past or you’ve had other surgeries on your uterus
- You have a problem, such as heart disease, that could be made worse by the stress of labor

- You have an infection that you could pass to the baby during a vaginal birth
- You are carrying more than one baby (multiple pregnancies)
- Your baby is too big to be delivered vaginally

During actual labor, your doctor may decide that there are developing complications that warrant a C-section:¹

- Labor is slow and hard or even stops completely
- Your baby shows signs of distress, such as an irregular heart rate
- There is a problem with the placenta or umbilical cord
- Your baby has certain birth defects

A growing number of doctors are offering C-sections as an alternative to natural birth, even when there is no medical reason for the procedure.¹ To many women, this option may be appealing because it seems convenient or perhaps because they are fearful of the potential pain of labor. The decision for a C-section is between you and your doctor, but you should be informed about C-section before considering one.



Here are some things you may want to consider:^{2,3}

1. The procedure itself is major abdominal surgery. It involves an incision through the skin, abdomen, muscle and then into the uterus. It requires manual adjustment of internal organs and incisions near both the bladder and bowel. A C-section involves risk of damage to surrounding organs, excessive bleeding and infection.
2. Recovery from a C-section can take longer, too. For several days after the surgery, women may be limited in their movement. Because it's major abdominal surgery, women who undergo the procedure are often told that they can't lift anything heavier than their newborn for at least two weeks. They may also be restricted in other activities such as driving, exercise and sexual intercourse.
3. Having a C-section may create complications with future pregnancies, so you should talk to your healthcare provider if you have plans for more than one child.

Sources:

1. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Preterm Labor and Birth, January 2019. Available from www.acog.org.
2. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Cesarean Birth: Frequently Asked Questions, May 2022. Available from www.acog.org.
3. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Vaginal Birth after Cesarean Delivery (VBAC), October 2020. Available from www.acog.org.

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