

The A, B, Cs of Cesarean Birth

Congratulations! You're having a baby! And you are ready. You packed your suitcase; selected a name; painted the baby's room; and organized the baby clothes. Now you are waiting for your due date to arrive. But then you get a call from your doctor recommending that you have a Cesarean section.

Cesarean section, or C-section, is the birth of a baby through an incision in the abdominal wall and uterus rather than through the vagina, or birth canal. Nearly 30 percent of all babies born in the United States are delivered by C-section. Regardless of age, first-time mothers are six times more likely to have a Cesarean delivery than women who have given birth before. The chance of C-section rises as a woman's age increases, even if her pregnancy is considered low risk.

Your doctor may advise that you have a C-section for one or more of the following reasons, including:

- Multiple pregnancy
- The baby is in a breech (bottom or feet first) or transverse (sideways) position
- The baby is known to have certain birth defects
- The baby is too big to pass through the birth canal
- Previous C-section delivery
- Existing maternal medical condition, such as HIV or genital herpes
- Maternal health condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure

Some women may plan to have a vaginal delivery, but if problems arise during labor, an emergency C-section may be performed to deliver the baby safely. Some reasons for an emergency C-section include:

- Problems with the placenta, such as placenta previa (when the placenta is below the baby and blocks all or part of the cervix) or placental abruption (when the placenta separates from the uterine wall too soon).
- If labor stops or does not progress normally.
- If the baby's shoulders get stuck in the birth canal.
- If the umbilical cord is pinched or enters the birth canal before the baby.
- If the baby is in distress.

Many women now are choosing to have a Cesarean section instead of vaginal birth. According to a study by the National Institutes of Health, approximately 2.5 percent of all C-sections were performed at the mother's request in 2004. Reasons for choosing Cesarean delivery include the convenience of knowing when the baby will be born, avoidance of labor and delivery pain, and reduced risk of damage to the pelvic floor that could cause incontinence.

However, as with any major surgery, there are risks associated with a Cesarean delivery. Complications from abdominal surgery include infection, increased blood loss, adhesions (internal scars) or injury to an organ. Compared to a vaginal delivery, women who undergo a C-section typically remain in the hospital longer and experience an extended recovery period.

Whether you deliver by Cesarean section for medical reasons or by choice, carefully consider all the risks and benefits of the surgery. You can still have a vaginal birth later even if you give birth the first time by C-section. To find out more about your delivery options, call Spring-Klein OB/GYN at 281-440-1770 today.