

Childbirth

Your treatment options. Your second opinion.



What is Childbirth?

Childbirth may happen at the end of your pregnancy in two different ways: vaginal delivery or caesarean section.

- > Vaginal delivery involves you going through the process of labour that delivers your baby from your uterus (womb) to the outside world.
- > Caesarean section involves surgery, where an incision (cut) is made through your lower abdomen and uterus, and your baby is delivered to the outside world by your surgeon.

Whichever childbirth you end up having, it can be helpful beforehand to understand and weigh up factors that may be relevant to any decisions you may make including the impact on your health and your baby's health, your personal preferences, and the risks and benefits of each type of childbirth.

Vaginal delivery

Vaginal delivery usually begins when your body goes into labour, which is brought on by changes in your uterus and cervix (bottom part of your uterus on the inside end of your vagina). However, if it looks like you may not start labour by 42 weeks, you and your doctor may discuss other options to deliver your baby.

Labour involves the uterine muscles contracting to gradually move your baby down into the pelvis as the lower part of the uterus and the cervix stretches and opens up. While the overall time required for labour varies for each woman, it usually goes through three stages: first stage continues until the cervix opens up 10 cm; second stage is pushing out and delivering your baby; and third stage is delivering out the placenta.

The pain felt due to contractions and stretching during vaginal delivery and your ability to cope with it, is also different for each woman. You may be fine with natural pain relief such as breathing and relaxation techniques, while others may choose medications, ranging from opioids through to an epidural block of the spinal cord.

Caesarean section

A caesarean section is surgery performed under an epidural or general anaesthesia and usually takes 30-50 minutes. It involves an incision (cut) in your lower abdomen and uterus.

A caesarean section may be either:

- > Unplanned: Performed as an emergency during labour, or
- > Planned (elective): A specific date is set for the surgery.

An unplanned caesarean may occur due to a health problem such as your baby not receiving enough oxygen, vaginal bleeding or your labour not progressing.

A planned caesarean may be suggested if there are potential risks associated with a vaginal delivery that should be avoided for you or your baby's health such as severe pre-eclampsia (pregnancy-related high blood pressure in mothers), the placenta's position blocks your baby's exit from the uterus or your baby has a risky medical condition.

A planned caesarean may also be considered for non-medical reasons for you or your baby. For example, you may request a caesarean due to anxiety and fear over vaginal delivery, particularly the pain, a perceived greater safety for your baby, and a previous negative experience with vaginal delivery.

Help for anxiety and safety concerns about vaginal delivery

If you're feeling anxiety and fear about a vaginal delivery or safety concerns for your baby, it may be helpful to speak to your doctor about labour, pain-reducing medications and the risks faced by your baby during a vaginal delivery. You may also see a healthcare professional who has expertise in anxiety and safety concerns.

Additional ways that may help you include:

- > Attend a relaxation class to learn to reduce any stress you're feeling.

Go to a birth preparation class to learn about the labour process, natural pain relief such as breathing techniques and pain-reducing medications that are available.

- > Read reliable and credible sources of information on the internet and in print. Your doctor or nurse may be able to make recommendations.

Always consult a medical expert before commencing a course of treatment for any medical condition.





Caesarean section and medical research

When evaluating you for caesarean section or vaginal delivery, your treating medical specialist will take into account many complex factors, including the latest medical research.

Both vaginal delivery and caesarean section may generally be considered a safe option for you and your baby, however there are risks and benefits.

Studies have found that for the mother in the short term, caesarean section compared to vaginal delivery may be associated with longer recovery time and stay in hospital, higher anaesthetic complications and infection rates, and more problems starting breastfeeding.

In addition, mothers who have had a caesarean may have a greater risk of complications such as uterine rupture and excessive bleeding.

For the baby in the short term, caesarean section compared to vaginal delivery may be associated with a greater risk of complications such as breathing problems and having to be cared for in a neonatal intensive care unit.

However, studies have also found for the mother in the short term, caesarean section compared to vaginal delivery may be associated with less urinary incontinence (unwanted leaking) and blood loss during childbirth, and for the baby, a lower risk of injury, infection and death (although the actual difference between both types of delivery is small).

Caesarean section and childbirth – the main points

- > Any decisions you may make about vaginal delivery or caesarean section may be helped by understanding and weighing up different relevant factors including your health, your baby's health, your personal preferences and the risks and benefits of each type of childbirth.
- > If you're considering a planned caesarean section, take into account what the medical studies have found on the risks and benefits of a caesarean section compared to a vaginal delivery, for you and your baby's health, both in the short term and also the long term.

Would you like a second opinion?

Deciding on a treatment path for a medical condition can be a difficult, complex and stressful question.

Would you like the benefit of an expert second opinion to help you to decide on your treatment options?

If you want to know more about GPS² or have a general enquiry, please contact us on 1800 477 246 or email via contact@gps2.com.au

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