

Preparing for caesarean birth.

A caesarean is an operation to deliver your baby through a cut made in your lower tummy and womb.

It can be planned – which is also known as elective surgery – or done in an emergency. You'll be given information about the next steps when you arrive at the hospital. If it's an emergency caesarean birth the plan to proceed will be discussed with you then.

If you're having a planned caesarean you can prepare your skin by:

- Stopping shaving or waxing your pubic hair at least one week before your operation.
- Having a shower or bath to clean your pubic area with your usual soap and water. Remember to not use soap on your vulva or vagina.
- Not applying any lotions or talcum powder to your skin, unless you have been directed to by your healthcare professional.

You'll need to stop eating for six hours, and stop drinking clear fluids for two hours, before a planned caesarean birth, unless you have been directed by your healthcare professional. This isn't the case in an emergency as you may have eaten or drunk while in labour.

Once in the operating room you'll be given anaesthetic by a specialist doctor called an anaesthetist, which will numb the lower part of your body while you stay awake during the birth. In some cases general anaesthetic will be used, which will put you to sleep.

You'll lie down on an operating table and a thin flexible plastic tube called a catheter will be inserted into your bladder to empty it before the caesarean.

For information on how to look after your bladder after your caesarean birth please see the video linked in the description.

A screen will be placed across your tummy so you can't see the operation being done, then a 10 to 15cm cut will be made in your lower tummy and womb. This is usually horizontally just below your underwear line, but sometimes it can be done vertically below your bellybutton.

The baby is delivered through this opening and will be lifted for you to see. If the baby is well enough they'll be brought to you for skin-to-skin contact. The medical team will inform you if this is not possible due to medical reasons.

It normally takes about 10-15 minutes to deliver the baby, then a further 40-50 minutes to complete the operation.

After the birth you'll be taken to the recovery area where a midwife or nurse will continue to look after you and your baby until you are ready to go to the postnatal ward. If you or your baby need to go to another medical team, such as the special care baby or neonatal unit, this will be discussed with you then.

You'll be offered:

- Pain relief to make you more comfortable.

- Treatments to reduce the risk of blood clots, such as compression stockings, medicine or injections.
- Food and water.

The midwives will guide you on when you can get out of bed, which is typically after the effects of the anaesthetic have worn off

For information on how to look after yourself after your caesarean birth, please see the video linked in the description.