

Caesarean Birth



The WHO recommends caesarean birth rates should be 15% in the UK - we are experiencing rates of more than triple that percentage. Over 55% in some trusts in 2021.

Definition :

A caesarean section (CS) is a surgical process where birth is through an incision in the wall of the uterus, rather than through the vagina.

- In the 1950s, 3% of births in England were by CS.
- By the early 1980s this had risen to 10% and in the 1990s rates started to climb rapidly, from 12% in 1990 to 21% in 2001.
- These national figures mask local variations where the CS rate ranges from 10% to 30% between hospitals.
- The number of elective CS (where the decision to carry out CS is taken before labour starts) has risen more slowly than the number of emergency CS.
- In 2000, the Department of Health (DH) commissioned an audit of births to obtain reliable and detailed information on CS. The audit found that over 85% of CS were carried out for one of four primary reasons: repeat caesarean, presumed foetal distress, failure to progress and breech birth.

It's important to have a run through of the eventualities of a caesarean birth so you are aware of your options and clear on your choices should one be necessary. A more natural approach to surgery is greatly recognised by most hospitals today. You can feel more involved in your birth and closer to a natural delivery, which will bring greater satisfaction, improved bonding and rates of breastfeeding.

- The doctors, anaesthetist and team will introduce themselves so you are clear with everyone in the room.
- You can make the theatre feel more personal to you by asking for your own music to be played, lowering of the lights and quietening any talking or sound.

- The siting of IV tubes and wires can be placed away from your chest and dominant arm so you can hold your baby immediately.
- You baby's cord can remain unclamped to allow the chance to take a first breath and optimum blood and nutrients to transfer from the placenta.
- You can ask for lowering of the surgical curtain so you can watch your baby being born.
- A baby born by caesarean requires ultimate skin-to-skin & close contact to wake its immunity, stimulate milk and find, feel and attach to its mother
- If the baby is born by c-section... Research is currently being undertaken into the use of vaginal swabs* to 'seed' c-section babies. The preliminary results are that the microbiome of swabbed babies are more similar to vaginally born babies. The protocol the researchers are using is:
 1. take a piece of gauze soaked in sterile normal saline
 2. fold it up like a tampon with lots of surface area and insert into the mother's vagina
 3. leave for 1 hour, remove just prior to surgery and keep in a sterile container
 4. immediately after birth apply the swab to the baby's mouth, face, then the rest of the body (you can see photos of this process here)
 5. If a baby is born by c-section it is even more important to encourage and support their mother to breastfeed. It may also be worth considering additional probiotic intake.

References :

1. <https://midwifethinking.com/2016/04/13/the-human-microbiome-considerations-for-pregnancy-birth-and-early-mothering/>
2. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/post/pn184.pdf>
3. <https://www.bmj.com/content/363/bmj.k4319>
4. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng192>