

What Will I Experience During a C-Section?

Whether you're having a planned C-section or an emergency C-section, it's only natural to wonder what the experience will be like. You might have questions like, "How will it feel?"; "Can my partner be in the room?"; "Will I get to hold my baby?"; "How can I start breastfeeding after surgery?" This is normal, but the good news is that thousands of babies are delivered by C-section every month without any problems or complications.

Every birth experience, including C-sections, is unique and different. For C-sections, your experience of it will depend on whether it is a scheduled C-section or an emergency section. An emergency c-section is performed during labor because of medical conditions that require your baby to be delivered immediately.

With a scheduled c-section, you will have more time to prepare. Be sure to follow your doctor's guidelines about when you need to stop eating and drinking in the hours before your surgery. The day of your c-section, your medical team will check your vital signs, and your baby will be monitored. You will have an IV and blood work done. You will also have to sign a surgical consent form.

Once you're in the operating room, you will be given anesthesia—usually an epidural or spinal block. This will block pain to the lower half of your body, but you will be fully awake and aware during the delivery. You will also still feel pressure and movement, but no pain, during the surgery.

"The room will be busy with a lot of activity. Her partner will be sitting right down next to her. They'll be the anesthesia staff sitting right by her head tending to her needs. They'll be the physician, the physician's assistant, the operating staff and the nurses who will be there to care for the baby."

If you're having an emergency C-section, you will also be given pain relief, but in many cases, you will be given general anesthesia for the procedure. This is because epidurals take time to work, and there might not be time during an emergency c-section. If you've had an epidural, your partner will be allowed in the room with you. Most hospitals only allow one visitor in the operating room during a c-section. The surgery itself is usually quick, with the baby delivered through an incision in your lower abdomen.

"From the start of the c-section to the baby coming out is typically about five to seven minutes. And after that, the next 35 or so minutes is spent just repairing the incisions, making sure mom is well attended to."

Once your baby has been delivered, the medical team will quickly check your baby, and then bring him or her over to you. You can begin skin-to-skin if you feel up to it, and your partner or nurse can help. This is part of the golden hour and is a great way for you and baby to start getting to know each other. You may even try to nurse at this time, and your nurse can help with that. This is a great time to take pictures and celebrate the delivery of your new baby!

Once your surgery is done, you will all go together as a family to the recovery room. In the recovery room, your medical team will monitor your pain closely, to make sure you are comfortable. This is a good time to practice nursing or continue skin-to-skin contact with your newborn if you feel up to it. Because you are recovering from surgery, ask your lactation consultant about the best positions to breastfeed your baby so you can heal.

From the recovery room, you'll move into the postpartum room, where you can have visitors. However, you may be tired. Rest if you need to. Limiting visitors may also be a good idea to allow your family time to bond and give you time to rest. Your catheter and IV will be removed the next day. You can begin eating again and make sure to drink plenty of fluids. You will also be encouraged to get up and walk around.

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You will go home after two to four days in the hospital. Remember to carefully follow your discharge instructions on incision care and activity levels. You'll probably be advised not to lift anything heavy or have sex for about six weeks. Remember to take it easy, get as much rest as you can, and ask your partner for help with your newborn as you recover from your c-section.

If you experience unusual symptoms or pain, or just have questions, call your doctor. Whether planned or not, a C-section is a safe way to deliver your baby. Ask your healthcare provider any questions you may have before the big day so you can feel comfortable and focus on your job as a new mom.