

Information for women who have had a Previous Caesarian Birth

Because your previous baby was born by Caesarian, you must decide if you wish to attempt a vaginal birth for this pregnancy. This sheet is made to provide information on some of the issues you should consider in making your decision. You can use it as a guide in discussing your birth plans with your midwife.

If you decide to have a trial of Vaginal Birth after Caesarian, commonly known as “VBAC” you will be asked to sign the attached consent form. If you choose a caesarian, a separate consent will be signed at the time a booking for surgery is made.

What are the requirements to have a trial of labour?

There are only a few requirements for trying a VBAC. The most important is that your caesarian section incision must have been in the lower part of your uterus, a “low segment transverse” incision. Your midwife will review the operative note of your caesarian section to confirm that.

Why is vaginal birth being proposed as an option?

Research has shown that up to 8 of 10 women who have previously had a caesarian section can successfully have a vaginal birth. Vaginal birth reduces the time spent in hospital; reduces the need for pain medication; reduces the risk of infection; and has a faster recovery time. All of these things can make it easier to care for your newborn baby.

Are there any risks involved in labour after a previous caesarian section?

Pregnant women who have a scar in their uterus from a previous caesarian section have a small risk of the old uterine incision coming apart during labour. This is called uterine rupture. Although most uterine ruptures can be treated with emergency caesarian section, serious complications can occur. The risks, to the mother, if her uterus ruptures, include bleeding which could be so severe as to require a hysterectomy. The risks of uterine rupture to the baby include brain damage, kidney damage, heart damage or even death.

If you go into labour on your own the chance of uterine rupture is approximately 1/200 (1/2 %), however if your labour is induced the chances of this happening are 1/100 (1 %).

Monitoring VBAC Labour

In general a woman who is in labour after a previous caesarian section must have a smoothly progressive labour. Your progress in labour will be checked regularly and the baby will be monitored carefully. The society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend that your baby’s heart be monitored continuously with an electronic fetal heart monitor during your labour. Your midwives may at any time determine that a caesarian section is recommended. They will discuss with you why it is not advisable to continue in labour and consult with an obstetrician.

What other options are there?

Instead of attempting a vaginal birth, you may choose to have a repeat caesarian section performed. Your midwife will arrange a consult with an obstetrician. Fortunately a caesarian section is a very safe operation. It is however associated with a higher risk of some complications than a vaginal birth. Some possible problems include infection in the incision, bleeding and a longer painful recovery.