Vaginal Birth after Cesarean Section (VBAC)

The old saying “once a cesarean always a cesarean” is not always true. The majority of women who have had a cesarean, also called a C-section, are candidates for a vaginal birth with their next pregnancy. The letters VBAC stand for “vaginal birth after cesarean.”

Why would I want a vaginal birth over a planned cesarean?

There are many benefits to the mother for a vaginal birth. These are:
- Faster recovery after birth
- Breastfeeding is generally easier after a vaginal birth
- Complications from surgery are prevented
- Less blood loss
- Decreased risk of infection
- Prevention of an injury occurring during surgery
- Less likely to get blood clots in the legs, which can happen from any surgery
- Less anesthesia and pain medicine are needed after delivery
- Lower cost for a vaginal birth than a cesarean
- Maternal death is potentially lower with a vaginal birth than a cesarean

There are also benefits for the baby with a vaginal birth. These are:
- Less risk of early delivery
- Labor prepares the baby for life outside the womb
- Fewer breathing problems
- More opportunities for mother-baby bonding

How do I know if I can have a vaginal birth?

Talk with your doctor about your ability to have a vaginal birth.
- If you had a prior C-section and had a low transverse incision, you may be able to have a VBAC.
- If you previously had a cesarean because your baby was in either a breech position (feet first) or there were concerns with your baby’s health during labor, you may be able to have a VBAC. If you had a C-section for other reasons, talk with your doctor about your ability to have a VBAC.
- If you are willing to prepare for a VBAC and accept the risks of a VBAC, you may be able to do so.
How do I know if I should have a repeat cesarean?
Talk with your doctor about your concerns with a VBAC.
• Some women prefer a scheduled, repeat cesarean.
• Women with a vertical uterine incision should not have a VBAC.
• Scheduled repeated C-section reduces the risk of uterine rupture during an attempted VBAC, which can potentially harm the mother and baby.

How can I prepare for a VBAC?
There are things you can do to prepare for a VBAC:
• Read about vaginal births after a cesarean, so you understand your options and know the statistics associated with VBAC and repeat cesarean delivery.
• Discuss the benefits and possibility of a VBAC with your health care provider.
  › Find out why you had a prior cesarean
  › Talk about a birth plan with your health care provider
• Prepare physically for a VBAC. Labor is the hardest work you will ever do. Exercise regularly and eat healthy foods.
• Take prenatal classes. Learn about the birthing experience.
• Believe in yourself, your body, and the process of birth.
  › Be proactive and talk about pain medicine options during birth with your health care provider.
  › Confront any negative emotions you may have from your prior cesarean birth. Some women experience guilt or disappointment. Develop positive feelings about the birthing process.
  › Reassure family and friends about the safe decisions you are making for you and your baby.