Cervical Cerclage

A cerclage is a stitch put in the cervix (neck of the uterus) to help prevent it from opening or (dilating) early. If the cervix does not stay closed until you are ready to deliver your baby, a miscarriage or a premature birth may occur.

What You Need to Know About Cervical Cerclage

Early dilation of the cervix usually happens when labor begins before the baby is full-term. If labor begins early after 24 weeks of gestation, medicine is used to try and stop the contractions and prevent further dilation.

In some women, the cervix may dilate painlessly without contractions. This condition may be caused by a weak cervix ("incompetent cervix"). This weakness usually occurs between 16 to 24 weeks of pregnancy. Women at risk of developing a weak cervix include:

- Women with a history of D&C's (dilation and curettage) for abortion, miscarriage or other reasons
- Daughters of women who took DES, a hormone used to prevent miscarriages
- Women who have had surgery on the cervix
- Women with damage to the cervix from previous births

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Learn more about your health care.
Your Hospital Stay

The cerclage is done under anesthesia in the hospital during the second trimester of pregnancy, around 24 weeks. You may stay in the hospital 1 to 7 days after the surgery or go home the same day. How long you stay depends on the type of stitch and on your pregnancy health. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

Prenatal Care with a Cervical Cerclage

Your health and the health of your baby are our first priority. With this therapy, it is important for you to follow your doctor’s treatment plan. This may include:

Rest
The first week after you surgery you will need to rest most of the day. You may need help at home. Lie down on your left side for one hour twice a day. Your doctor may want you to have more bed rest and will recommend what is best for you.

Activity
No physical sports or activities are to be done. This includes jogging, running, tennis, long walks, heavy lifting or frequent trips up and down stairs. Heavy cleaning should not be done including scrubbing floors, changing curtains and moving furniture. Ask your doctor about long trips by car or plane.

Working
If you can work, the type and number of hours will depend on the cervical exams done by your doctor. Talk to your doctor about your working at each visit.

Sexual Activity
All sexual activity and breast stimulation should be stopped. Ask your doctor for advice.

Prenatal Visits
Your visits to your doctor will be every 1 to 3 weeks. Your cervix and stitch will be checked at each visit. It is important to come to every appointment.
Removal of the Cervical Cerclage

For some types of cerclage, your doctor will remove the stitch around 36 weeks into your pregnancy. This may allow you to have a vaginal delivery. The stitch can be removed in the doctor's office or in the Labor and Delivery area. You will usually not need anesthesia. You may go into labor within a few hours after the stitch is removed (unlikely), or your pregnancy may continue for several more weeks. If you are planning to have another baby, another cerclage may be placed during that pregnancy. In the next pregnancy, you will need to have early and frequent cervical exams.

For other types of cerclage, the stitch may be left in place and the baby delivered by cesarean section. The same cerclage may be used for another pregnancy.

When to Contact Your Doctor or Labor and Delivery

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the signs:

- Symptoms of preterm labor:
  - Cramping or feel like you have your period
  - Low backache
  - Contractions, tightenings, or baby balling up
  - Pressure in lower back, abdomen or thighs
  - Increase or change in vaginal discharge
- Any foul smelling vaginal discharge
- Any vaginal spotting, bleeding or tan discharge
- Bag of waters breaks or leaks

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.