

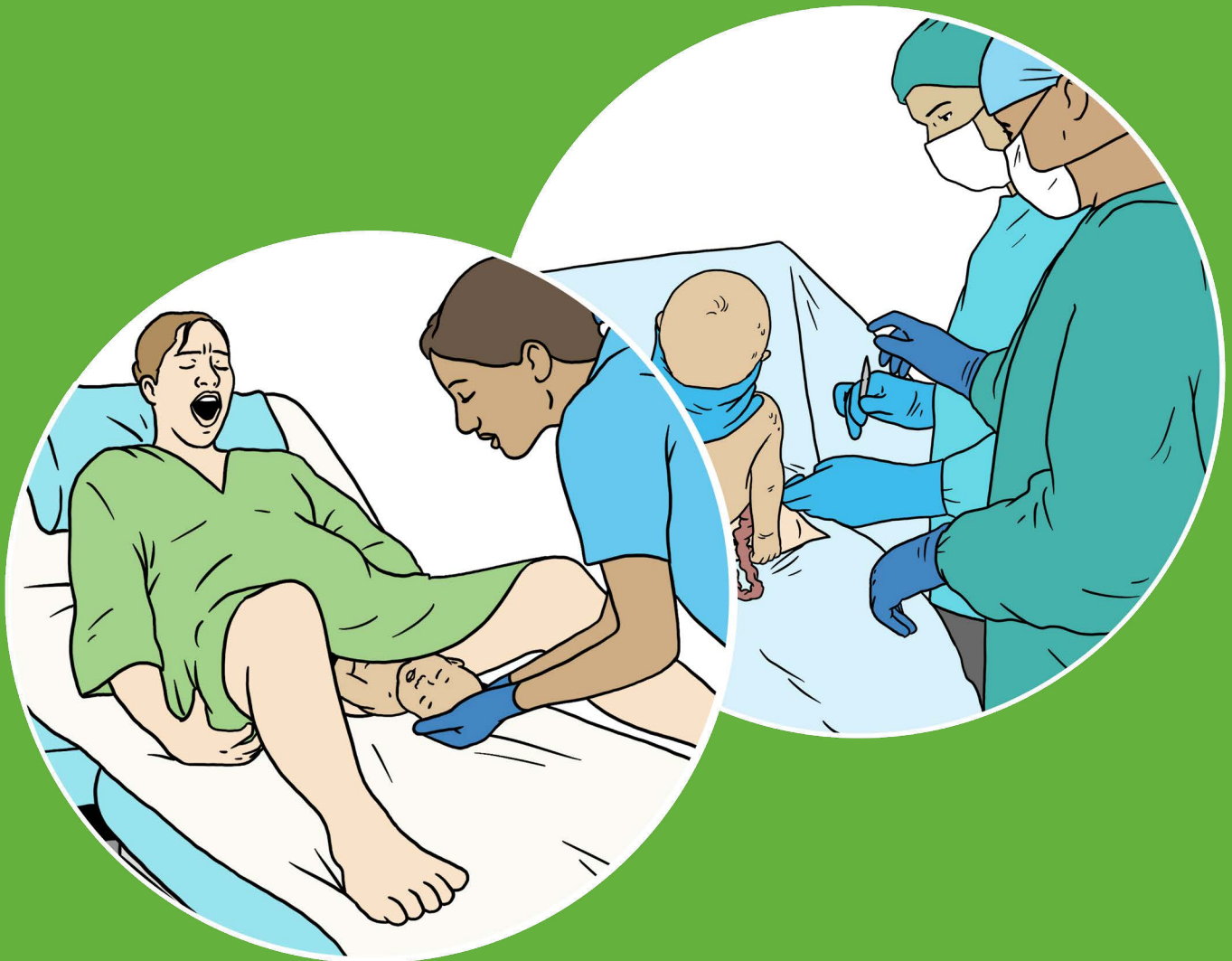


**Local Maternity &  
Neonatal System**



## Information for you

# Birth options after having a caesarean section

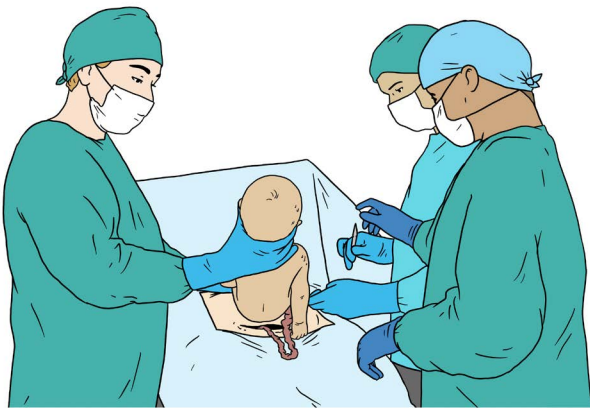


**easy read**

## About this information



This information is for anyone that has given birth by having a **caesarean section** before and wants to know more about birth options when having another baby.



A **caesarean section** or C section is a way of giving birth through **surgery** instead of pushing the baby out through the vagina. We will use the term C section in this booklet.

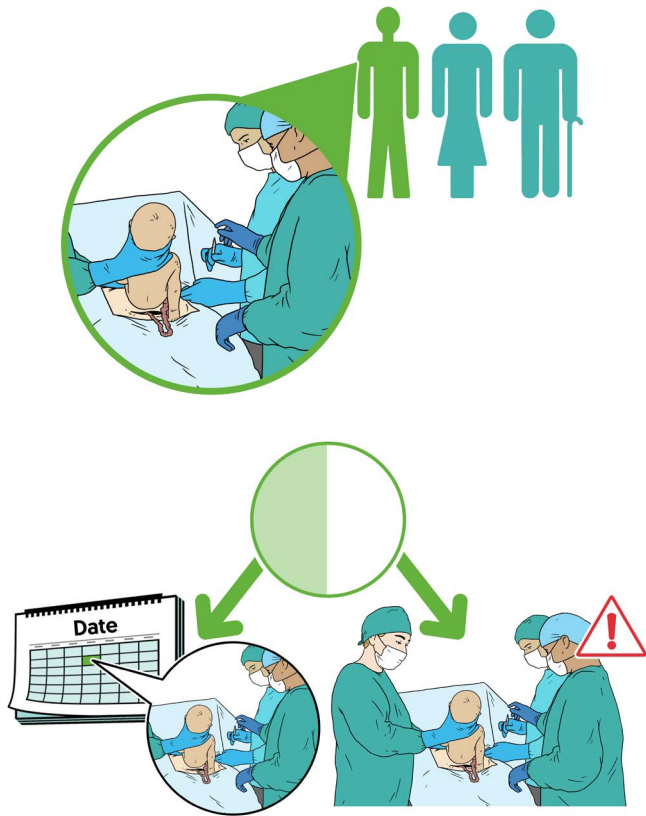


A **surgery** or operation is when doctors remove, replace, or fix something inside your body.



Giving birth by pushing the baby out through the vagina is called a **vaginal birth**.

## How common is it to have a C section?



More than 1 in 3 people in the UK give birth by C section and many people have more than one C section.

About half of these C sections are planned and half are done as an emergency option.

## What are my options after having a C section before?

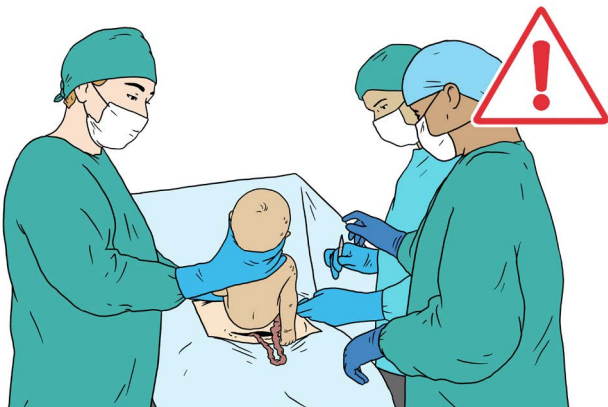


You have the choice to have a vaginal birth or to have a planned C section.

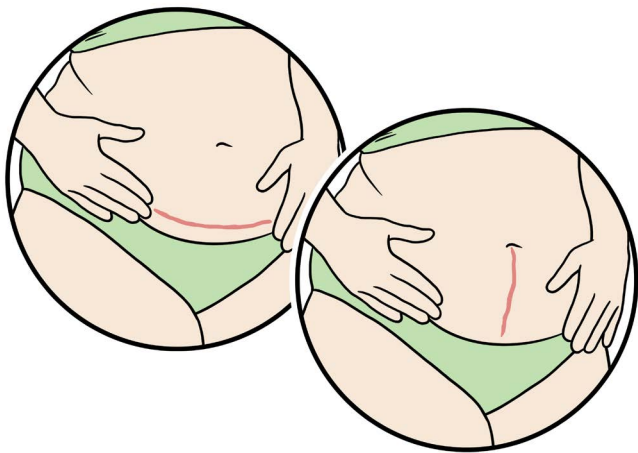
**You should think carefully about things like:**

- why you had a C section before

For example if you had to have an emergency C section.



Before



if you have had a vaginal birth before

if there were any problems the last time you gave birth

the type of cut your doctor used to do the C section surgery

how you felt when you gave birth before





if you are having any problems with your pregnancy



how many babies you want to have.

C sections get more dangerous the more you have, so you may want to choose to have a vaginal birth if you want more babies.



Your healthcare team will talk to you about your birth options and any worries you may have about giving birth again.

### What if I have had more than 1 C section before?



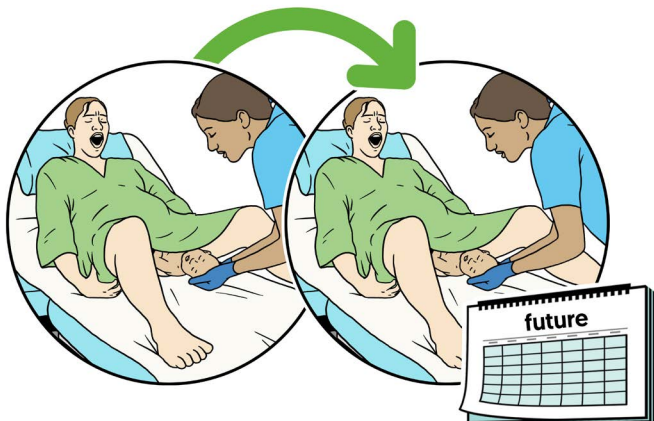
If you are thinking about having a vaginal birth after having more than 1 C section before, you should talk to a doctor.

# Vaginal birth after a C section

Before



1



**VBAC** stands for **V**aginal **B**irth **A**fter **C**aesarean, this is the name for when someone has a vaginal birth after they have had a c section before.

## How likely am I to be able to have a vaginal birth?

After having 1 C section most people with a normal pregnancy go on to have a vaginal birth.

## What is good about having a vaginal birth?

It is easier to recover from a vaginal birth than a surgery like a C section.

## If you can have a vaginal birth you will:

- be more likely to be able to have another vaginal birth in the future



get back to everyday activities sooner



be more likely to go home from the hospital sooner

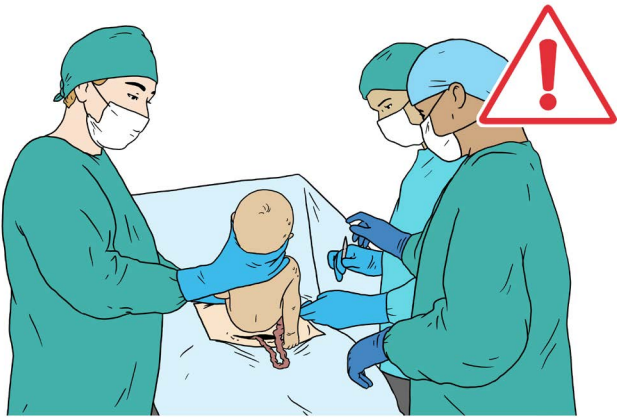


be more likely to be able to have skin to skin contact with your baby straight away

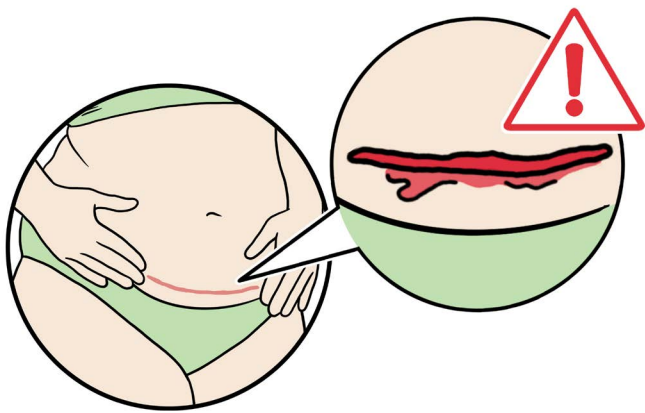


your baby will have less chance of having trouble breathing after being born.

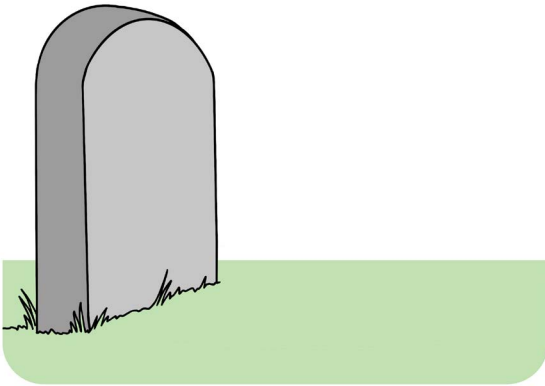
## What are the problems with having a vaginal birth?



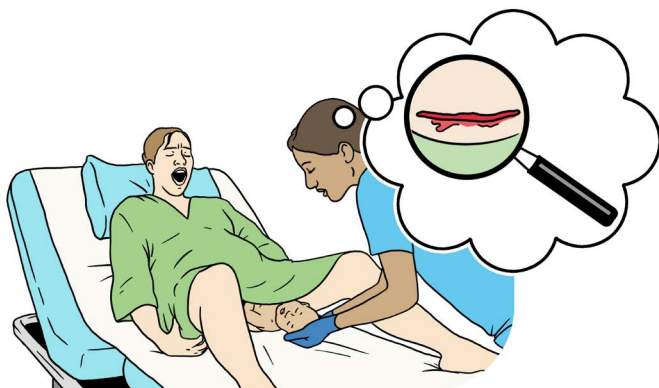
You may need an emergency C section, this can cause more problems than a planned C section.



Your scar from the C section you had before can open when you give birth. This is called a **uterine rupture**.

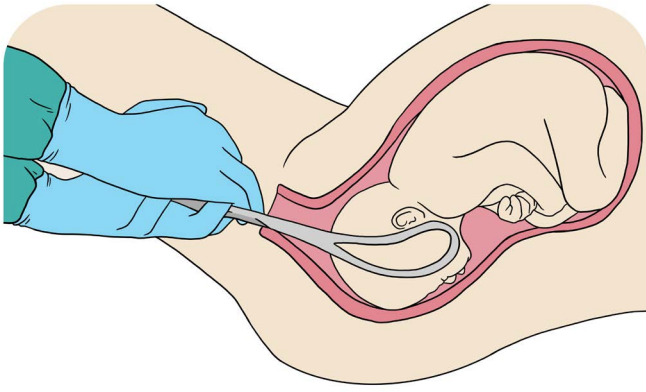


A uterine rupture is an emergency and there is a risk that you or your baby could die because of it.

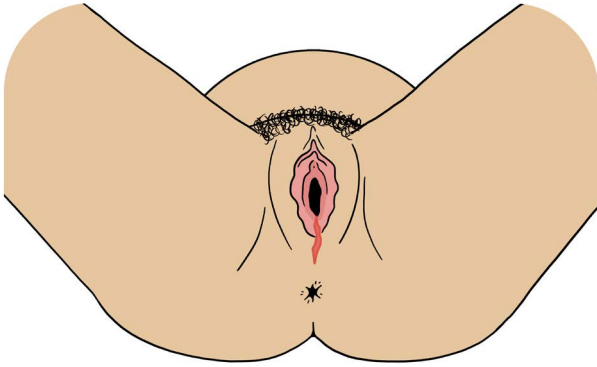


This is very rare, and your healthcare team will be looking for any signs of this happening so they can help before there are serious problems.

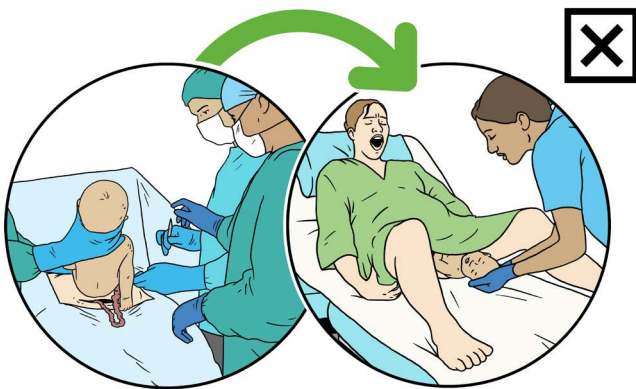




You may need help from your healthcare team to give birth, this could be by using tools like forceps to help pull the baby out. This is called an **assisted birth**.

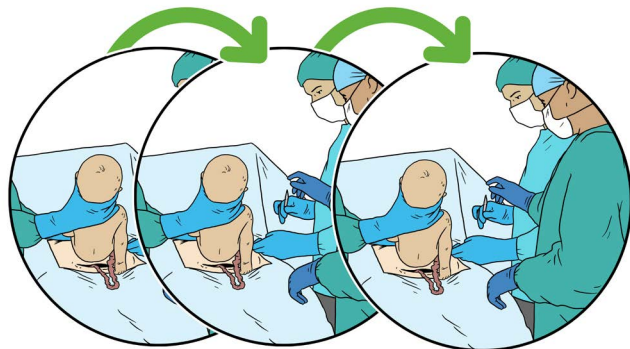


You may tear the muscle below the vagina when giving birth. This is a common risk in all vaginal births.



## When should you not have a vaginal birth?

**Most people can have a vaginal birth after having C section before, but it is not advisable if:**



- you have had 3 or more C sections before



- your C section scar has opened when you have given birth before



the C section you had before was cut higher up than normal

This can be called a classical C section or a classical caesarean.

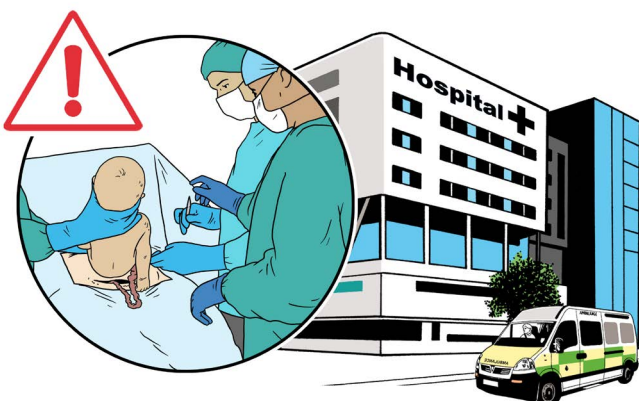


you have been recommended a C section because of problems you are having in your pregnancy

## What happens when the baby starts coming?



You will be advised to have your baby in the hospital so that your healthcare team can see how you and your baby are doing and be ready to help if its needed.



This could be by giving you an emergency C section if it is needed.



You should contact the hospital as soon as possible if your waters have broken or if you think your baby is coming.



If your C section scar starts hurting or bleeding, or if you start bleeding you should contact the hospital straight away.



When your baby is coming, your healthcare team will check their heartbeat.



At the hospital you can have medicine to help with any pain you are having.



## What happens if the baby does not come after 41 weeks?



If the baby does not come after 41 weeks your healthcare team will talk to you about your birth options.

### Your birth options could be:

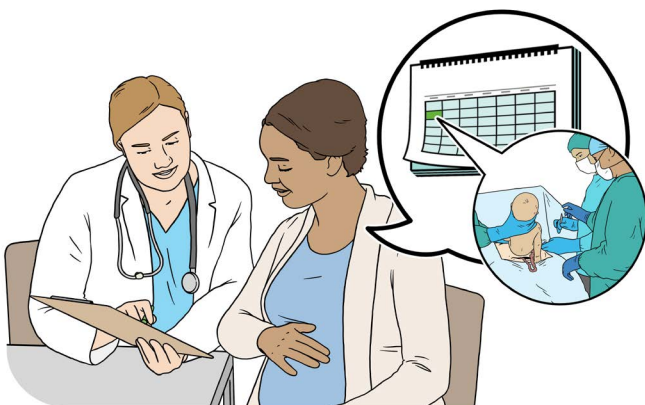


- waiting a little longer



- having your healthcare team use medicine to try to get the baby to come

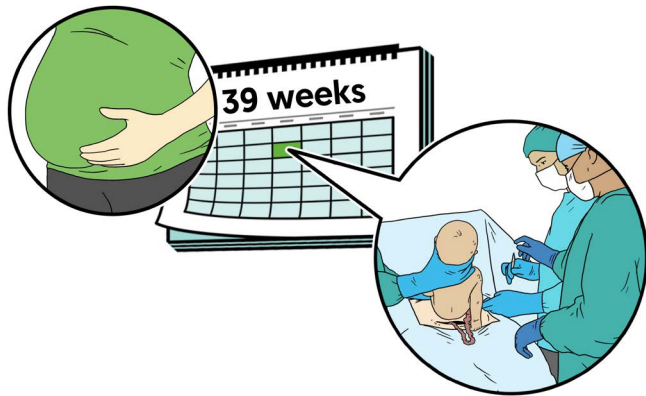
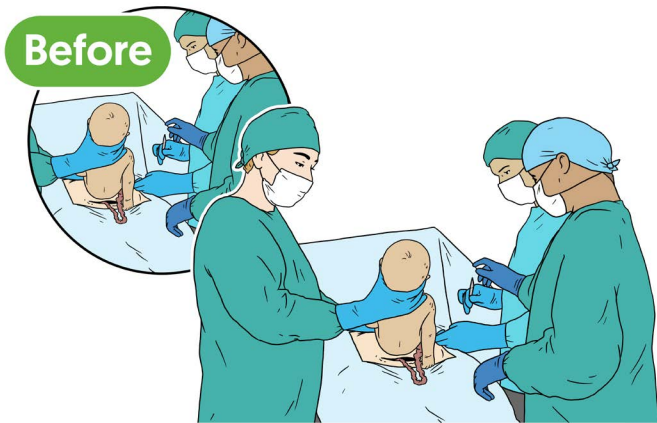
This is called an **induction of labour**.



- planning a C section



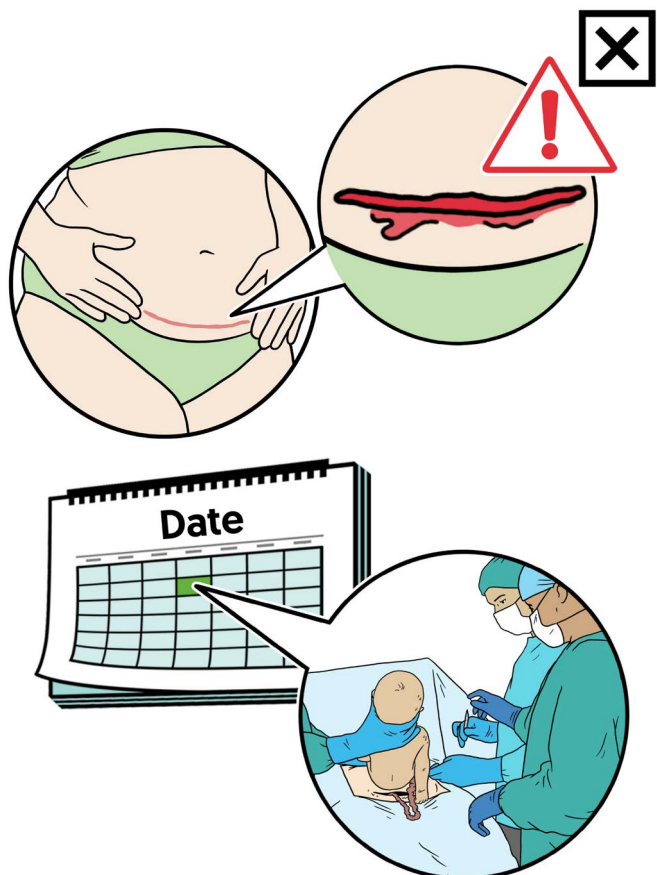
# Choosing to plan for another C section



**ERCS** stands for **E**lective **R**epeat **C**aesarean **S**ection, this is the name for when someone chooses to plan for another C section after having one before.

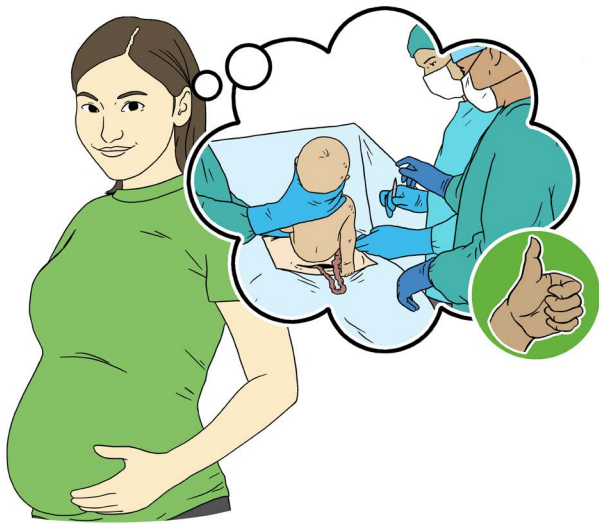
This will normally be planned for after you are 39 weeks pregnant.

## What is good about having another C section?



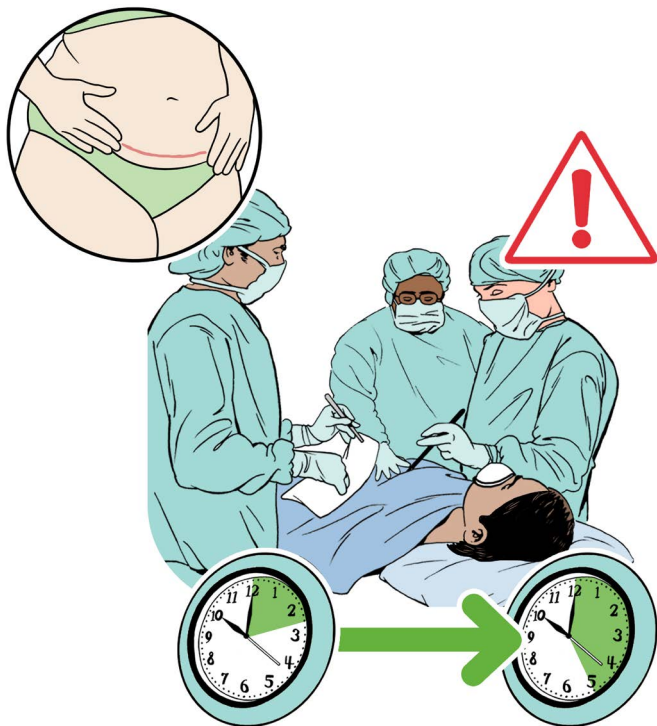
It is unlikely for your scar from the C section you had before will open when you give birth.

You will have a planned date to give birth on. But there are times that this date may have to change.



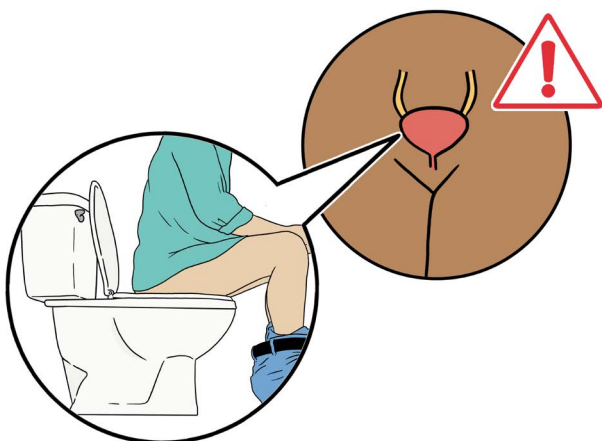
You may have had a difficult vaginal birth in the past and feel better knowing that you will have another C section.

## What are the problems with having another C section?

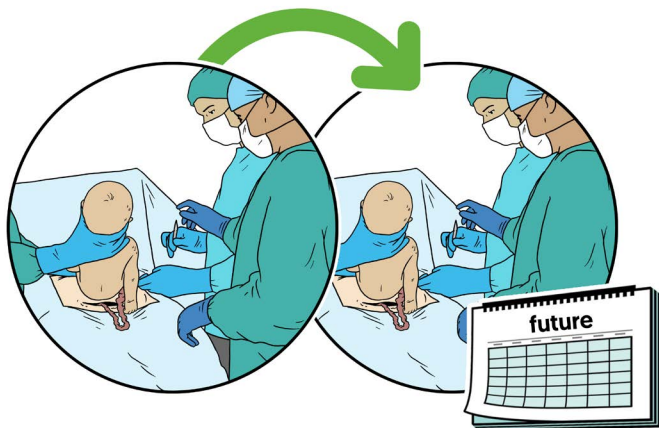


A C section can cause scarring inside your body as well as the scar you can see on your stomach.

This scarring is called **scar tissue**, it can make having another surgery slower, more difficult to do, and can cause other problems.

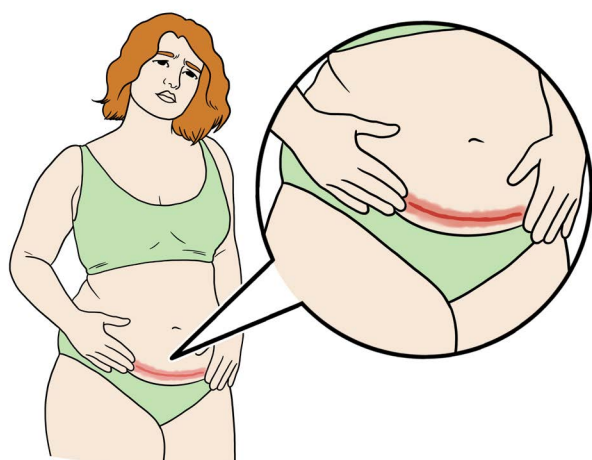


These problems can be things like damage to your **bladder**. Your **bladder** is the organ that holds your wee.

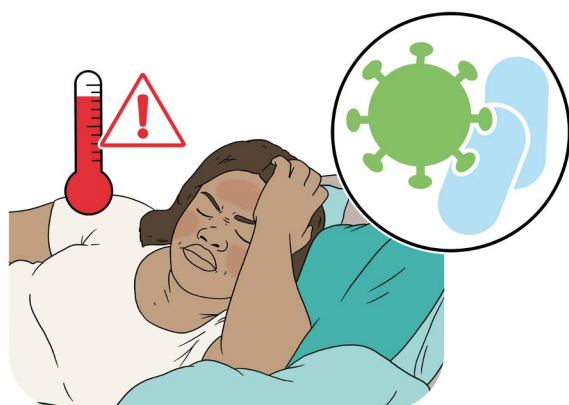


You get more scar tissue with every C section you have, because of this you are more likely to need to have a C section if you have another baby.

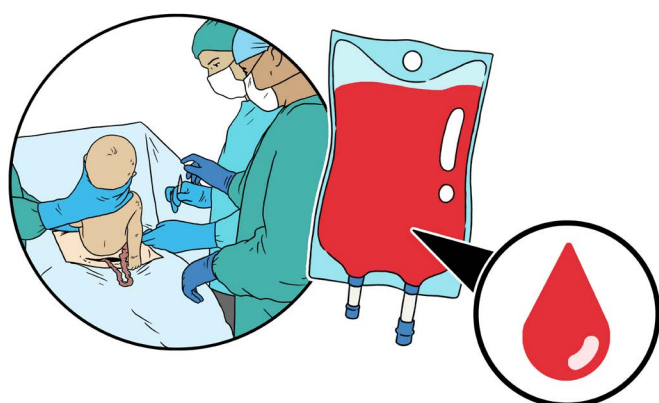
**A C section is a serious surgery, and all surgeries have risks some of these are:**



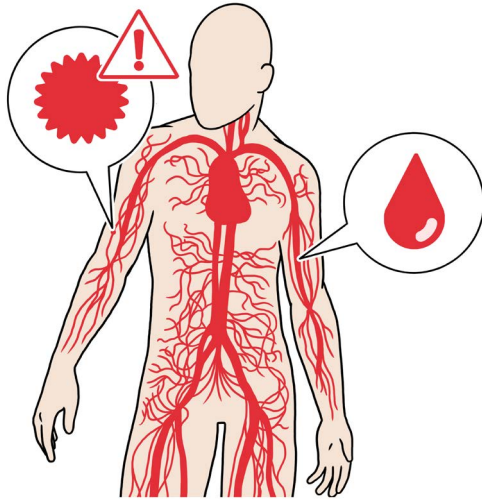
- the cut the doctors made could get **infected** and make you unwell for a long time



An **infection** is when your body is attacked by bacteria or virus. Infections cause you harm.



- you may need to be given blood



you may get a **blood clot**

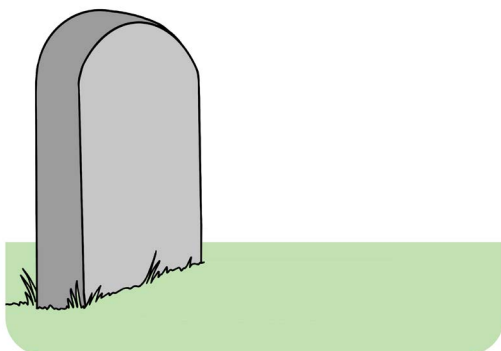
This is when your blood comes together to make a blob called a clot that can move around your body and cause serious health problems.



It can take a long time to recover from having a C section. You may need help to do everyday tasks and will not be able to drive for around 6 weeks.



Babies born by C section are more likely to have some breathing problems when they are first born but this does not last long.



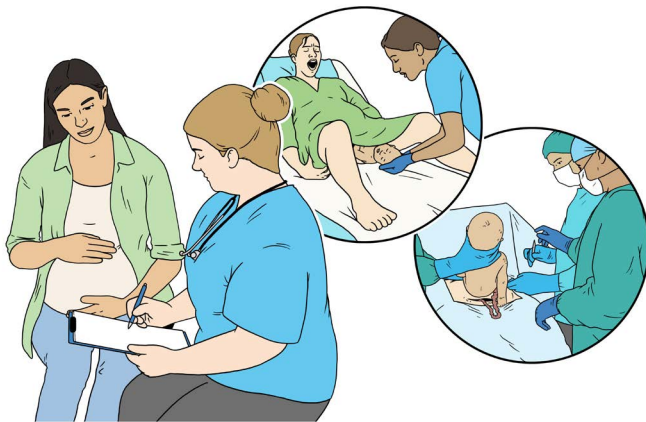
There is a higher chance that you could die after a C section if you have had many C sections before. This is rare but can happen.



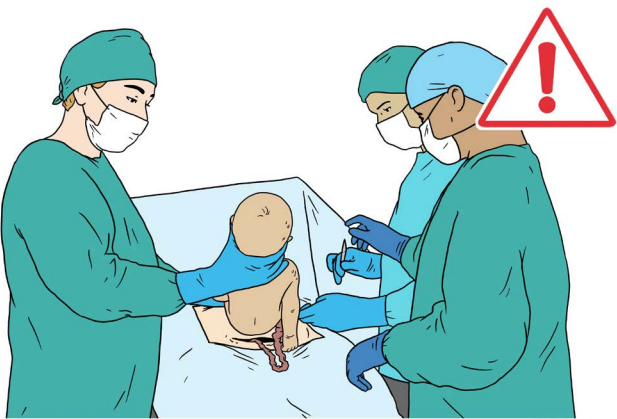
## What if my baby starts coming before my planned C section date?



Let your healthcare team know as soon as you think your baby is coming.



At the hospital your healthcare team will check to see if the baby is coming and talk to you about what your birth options are.



It is likely that you will be able to have an emergency C section.



But if the baby is coming very soon, it may be safer to have a vaginal birth.

## Making a choice

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want to ask and bring it to your appointment.

If you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare, these are 3 questions you should ask:

1. What are my other choices?
2. What is good about the options, and are there any risks?
3. What support can I get to help me make this choice?

## Sources and acknowledgements

This information has been developed by the RCOG Patient Information Committee. It is based on the RCOG Green-top Clinical Guideline Birth after Previous Caesarean Birth which you can find online at: [www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/gtg45](http://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/gtg45).

This leaflet was reviewed before publication by women attending clinics in Raigmore Hospital, King's College Hospital, Queen's Hospital, St Mary's Hospital, University Hospital Lewisham and Wrexham Maelor Hospital, by the RCOG Women's Network and by the RCOG Women's Voices Involvement Panel. The RCOG produces guidelines as an educational aid to good clinical practice. They present recognised methods and techniques of clinical practice, based on published evidence, for consideration by obstetricians and gynaecologists and other relevant health professionals. This means that RCOG guidelines are unlike protocols or guidelines issued by employers, as they are not intended to be prescriptive directions defining a single course of management.

A glossary of all medical terms is available on the RCOG website at: [www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/medical-terms](http://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/medical-terms).

## Easy Read acknowledgment

This information was translated into easy words and pictures by CHANGE [changepeople.org](http://changepeople.org)

Co-produced for BOB LMNS led by Maternity Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust

Original text published in July 2016

Easy read published in June 2025