



Important Information about your Caesarean section before and after your surgery at Tygerberg Hospital

Patient sticker

What is a caesarean section?

A caesarean section is an operation to deliver a baby. It involves making a cut in the front wall of your stomach and womb.

At Tygerberg labour ward, we have limited theatre space available:

- There is one **emergency theatre** that operates 24 hours per day, every day of the week. Women who need emergency operations are operated here.
 - It is important that you know that cases on this list are booked according to priority. This means that cases where the mother or the baby's life is at risk will be done first. Even if you are next in line, a severe emergency may be pushed in front of you when needed.
- There is one additional **elective (planned) theatre** available on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays (08h00-16h00) and Wednesdays (08h00-13h00).
 - A planned (elective) procedure is where the operation is already planned at the clinic and you get a date to come in the day before your operation.
 - When an operation is planned before the time, but this list is already fully booked, we will ask you to come to the labour ward admissions area when you are 39 weeks pregnant, the doctor in the clinic will give you an exact date.
 - You will then be asked to wait in the admissions area until the labour ward team has completed their round and knows the status of the labour ward theatres.
 - This means we cannot tell you the exact time that the operation will take place, as it depends on the number of emergencies.
 - It also means that your operation may happen during the night, if there is an opening then.
 - If the labour ward is very busy, this may take more than a day of waiting.
 - If the waiting time becomes too long, we will ask you to go home again and try the next day again.
 - We apologise in advance for any inconvenience this may cause, but we ask you to understand that the labour wards in the Western Cape are extremely busy and we frequently have more patients than we have beds available.
 - We pledge to do our utmost best for you and your partner to have a positive birthing experience even if the ward is very full and we cannot help you immediately. Someone will always update you regarding the list.

Pain relief

A caesarean section is usually carried out under spinal anaesthetic, where the lower part of your body is numbed. The operation usually takes about 40 minutes. You will be awake but not feel any pain, so you will be able to see your baby immediately after birth and hold her/him while the operation is completed.

Partner

Your birth partner is welcome to sit with you in theatre during the operation. If there are serious complications, we will ask your partner to wait just outside of the theatre while we deal with the complications.

Why do I need a caesarean section?

A caesarean section is usually carried out when a normal birth could put you or your unborn baby at risk. The reason for your caesarean section will be discussed with you by a doctor.

Can there be any complications or risks?

Frequent risks when having a caesarean section can include:

- Persistent wound and abdominal discomfort.
- Bleeding.
- Infection.
- Injury to the baby – minor skin cuts in about 1 – 2% of cases, slight difficulty in breathing in about 12%.

Serious risks when having a caesarean section include:

- Uncommon:
 - Emergency hysterectomy (7 – 8 per 1,000 women).
 - Return to theatre for further surgery (5 per 1,000 women).
 - Admission to intensive care unit (9 per 1,000 women).
- Future pregnancies.
 - Placenta (after birth) covering the entrance to the womb (4 – 8 per 1,000 women).
 - Tear in the womb (2 – 7 per 1000 women).
 - Stillbirth (1 – 4 per 1,000 women).
- Rare:
 - Organ injuries: bladder or bowel system (1 per 1000 women).
 - Developing a blood clot (4 – 16 per 10,000 women).
- Very rare:
 - Death, approximately one woman in every 10,000 women.

Is there anything I must bring with me to the hospital?

Please pack essential toiletries, a change of nightwear, baby clothes, and some nappies.

Your belongings will remain on the ward where you are admitted. Ensure that you have your valuables with you at all times or that they are placed in the lockable locker at your bedside while you are in the theatre. Only a mobile phone or camera can be taken into the theatre. Please do not bring with you any unnecessary items. Remember to bring slippers and a dressing gown. You will be asked to change into a hospital gown prior to going to the theatre.

What happens afterwards?

Following your caesarean section, you and your baby (babies) will be transferred to a recovery area. The midwifery, obstetric and anaesthetic teams will care for and observe you. You will be supported with caring for your baby (babies).

Once you have recovered from the anaesthetic and all your observations are stable, you and your baby (babies) will be transferred to the postnatal ward.

Visiting

Once you have recovered, you will be transferred to the postnatal ward where standard visiting times apply: 3pm to 4pm and 7pm to 8pm. Please note that only direct family members and partners are allowed (one at a time), no children.

Caring for your wound

Your wound (the cut for the caesarean section) will be covered with a waterproof dressing which allows the midwife/doctor to see your wound so an assessment can be made. The doctor will advise you on when to have your stitches removed. Usually 7 – 10 days after your operation. If there are any signs of infection, like pain that gets worse every day, redness or swelling around the wound or pus or fluid coming from the wound, please report to your local clinic as soon as possible.

- Whilst your wound dressing is in place, you may take a shower. Gently pat dry the wound area.
- Once the dressing has been removed, a midwife will continue to advise you on how to look after your wound to prevent infection. This will include advice on gently cleaning and drying the cut area daily using a clean towel.
- It is advised that you wear comfortable underwear which does not press on the wound.
- To reduce the risk of infection, wash your hands
 - before and after visiting the toilet.
 - prior to feeding your baby.

Preventing blood clots

During your hospital stay, you will be assessed for your risk of thrombosis (blood clot).

Following your caesarean section, you may be prescribed an anti-clotting daily injection. This is usually for the time you spend in the hospital, or it may be longer if you are assessed as a high risk for thrombosis.

When you are discharged from hospital

You will be given information on when to follow up at your local clinic to weigh your baby and check your wound. Usually, 2-4 days after you leave the hospital. If you had complications during your pregnancy, like high blood pressure or diabetes, your doctor in the ward will prescribe the medication you need to take when you are discharged. This medication can be different from the medication you were using during your pregnancy. You will also be advised on when to follow up to have your blood pressure and sugar levels checked if that is necessary.

Symptoms to watch out for

After having a caesarean section, contact your midwife or GP straight away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- severe pain
- leaking urine
- excessive vaginal bleeding
- your wound becomes more red, painful and swollen
- a cough or shortness of breath
- swelling or pain in your calf

These symptoms may be a sign of an infection or blood clot, which should be treated as soon as possible.

It takes longer to recover from a caesarean section than it does after a vaginal delivery.

In the first few weeks after giving birth, try to get as much rest as possible. Avoid walking up and down stairs too often, as your stomach may be sore. However, you should take gentle daily walks to reduce your risk of blood clots.

You will be given regular pain relief medication to take at home, for as long as you need them.

Getting back to normal

In general, it will take about six weeks for all your tissues to heal completely. Before this time, basic activities, such as caring for your new baby and looking after yourself, should be possible.

It is advised not to drive for 6 weeks following your caesarean section. Contact your insurance company for advice if you can drive before this time.

It is advised not to lift anything heavier than your baby for 6 weeks.

It is advised not to do any procedure that involves pushing or pulling for 4 weeks as this may place a strain on your abdominal muscles and the wound.

Future pregnancies

If you have had a delivery by caesarean section, it does not necessarily mean you will have to have a caesarean again in the future. You can discuss future pregnancy options with your obstetrician or midwife in the hospital or community.

It is beneficial for your own and your children's health to wait at least 12-18 months before becoming pregnant again. Please think about your desired family size and discuss how you can achieve this with your doctor. If you are sure that your family is complete and you are not planning any further pregnancy, you can request a sterilisation procedure to be done with your caesarean section. This is a very safe procedure that works very well in preventing pregnancies, and it does not increase the risk of complications of your operation. Ask your doctor for more information regarding a sterilisation procedure.

All the best and enjoy your new baby!