

Caring for my Caesarean Section Wound After Delivery

A guide for patients, birthing partners and relatives

What is a Caesarean Section?

A caesarean section (C-section) is an operation to deliver your baby through an incision made in your abdomen and womb, usually just below your bikini line. The incision is typically 15–20 cm long. Around one in four pregnancies in the UK result in a caesarean birth.

Why Do People Have Caesarean Sections?

C-sections may be planned or performed in emergencies due to complications during vaginal delivery. Whether chosen or medically necessary, your recovery process will follow similar principles.

How Long Until I Recover?

Recovery usually takes around **six weeks**, but this varies depending on:

- Whether there were complications during surgery
- Your general health
- How much rest you are able to get (especially if caring for other children)

Gentle walking is encouraged, but avoid strenuous activity. Ask for help when lifting heavy items, including prams and car seats.

Driving After a Caesarean Section

You should **not drive for a few weeks** after your surgery. You may resume driving when:

- You can **comfortably wear a seatbelt**
- You can **perform an emergency stop safely**
- You are **no longer taking strong painkillers**
- You feel **able to concentrate fully**

Check with your car insurance provider - some require medical clearance or a minimum recovery period (often 6 weeks). If unsure, speak to your GP or midwife.

Looking After Your C-Section Wound

Your midwife will visit you at home around **day 5** post-delivery to check your baby and remove your dressing -unless you have a **PICO dressing** (see below).

Stitches

- **Absorbable stitches** dissolve within 3–4 weeks, these are usually clear in colour.
- **Non-absorbable stitches** need removal by your midwife or practice nurse - check before discharge, these are usually blue in colour.

Cleaning Your Wound

- Use **plain water only**, avoid soaps or oils for the first 6 weeks.
- **Do not submerge** your wound in water (e.g., baths) for 2 weeks.
- Showering is fine—let water run over the wound gently.
- Pat dry with a **clean towel**, separate from your body towel.
- Avoid touching the wound unless necessary and always wash hands first.

Signs of Infection

Observe your wound for signs and symptoms of infection, these are:

- Redness, swelling, pus, smell, weeping, or wound opening, increasing pain
- Feeling generally unwell

If you have any of these, call Maternity Assessment Unit Triage on 0151 702 4140 if your baby is under 42 days old for a self-referral to wound clinic. Otherwise, contact your GP.

Underwear Tips

Wear **cotton, loose-fitting or high-waisted underwear** to avoid irritation. Avoid tight bands over the wound for 4–6 weeks.

Healing Timeline

By **week 5–6**, your wound should have healed into a scar. It may appear red/pink initially and fade over time. You may experience altered sensation near the scar -this usually improves.

Lifestyle Factors Affecting Healing

Smoking

Smoking reduces oxygen supply to tissues and slows healing. Seek support from your GP or practice nurse to quit.

Diet

Eat a balanced diet rich in protein and stay hydrated. Supplements are usually unnecessary.

Weight

Many studies have found that a high BMI increases the risk of wound infection and delayed healing.

Diabetes

Keep blood sugar well-controlled to reduce infection risk and promote healing.

PICO Dressing

You may have a **PICO dressing in theatre** if you're at higher risk of infection (e.g., high BMI, diabetes).

- It's a **negative pressure device** that helps close the wound, remove moisture, and improve blood flow.
- The dressing lasts **one week** and is removed by your midwife on **day 7**.
- The **PICO box is not waterproof** - unscrew it before showering and reconnect afterward.

Troubleshooting PICO



- **Flashing for leak:** Lie flat, smooth edges, press orange button.
- **Flashing full:** If dressing is stained, contact your midwife.
- **Flashing battery:** Batteries last 7 days—flashing may indicate end of life.

For ongoing issues, contact your midwife or **Tissue Viability Nurse via hospital switchboard**.

Pain After Caesarean Section

Expect soreness for **1 - 2 weeks**. Use pain relief as advised - some medications are unsuitable for breastfeeding. Ask your midwife or doctor.

Getting In and Out of Bed

This can often be difficult to do following a caesarean section. You may find it beneficial if you:

- Roll onto your side
- Drop legs over the edge
- Push up sideways into sitting position

Reverse the process to lie down.

Preventing Blood Clots

Stay active and hydrated. You may be prescribed daily injections if at higher risk.

Signs of Blood Clots

- Sudden redness, swelling, or pain in legs
- Chest pain or shortness of breath

Call **111**, your **GP**, **midwife**, or **health visitor** immediately.

Feedback & Accessibility

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