

Are you thinking of asking for a caesarean section?

You will be having your baby in the North Central London Maternity Network, which includes Barnet and Chase Farm, North Middlesex, Royal Free, University College London Hospitals and The Whittington.

We want to provide you with the highest quality care we can, that is safe and ensures that you have your baby in the way that is most appropriate for you and your baby.

VAGINAL BIRTH

There is a lot of evidence to support the widely-held view that pregnancy ending in vaginal birth is a normal process which is safe and appropriate for women with a low predicted risk of complication in the UK.

CAESAREAN SECTION BIRTH

There has been an increase in the proportion of women who have their baby by caesarean section across the UK, giving rise to questions about whether all caesarean sections are necessary.

The cause for this concern is that caesarean section is major abdominal surgery that is associated with a number of risks when compared to vaginal birth. These risks can be categorized into 3 groups:

Risks for you:

- Higher risk of uterine (womb) infection
- Higher risk of severe bleeding (haemorrhage)
- Higher risk of developing a blood clot in your legs or lungs
- Risk of accidental surgical damage to your bladder or bowel
- Longer stay in hospital

Risks for baby:

- Higher risk of your baby developing breathing problems following birth. This may mean your baby is admitted to hospital
- Difficulties with breastfeeding

Risks for future pregnancies

- Higher chance of developing low lying placenta (placenta praevia)
- Higher chance of developing a placenta (accreta) which grows abnormally into the uterine wall and sometimes beyond; these are rare complications but are serious enough to endanger your life and that of your baby.
- More chance of infertility following first caesarean section
- More chance of stillbirth

WHEN IS A CAESAREAN SECTION RECOMMENDED?

It is important to emphasise that for many of these risks, the increase related to caesarean section is small and most women having a cesarean section will not be affected by them. In addition, there are a number of situations where you and your doctor or midwife may feel that the risks of vaginal birth are increased and outweigh those of caesarean section; such reasons can be identified before labour (e.g. if the placenta covers the neck of the womb (cervix) or during labour e.g. if the baby's heart rate monitoring suggests that the baby is not getting enough oxygen. In these cases, where it is clearly safer to have a caesarean section, the doctor/midwife will discuss this with you and arrange for a caesarean section if this is what you want.

WHAT IF THERE ARE NO MEDICAL REASONS FOR A CAESAREAN SECTION?

If there are no identifiable factors that increase the risk of vaginal birth then caesarean section will not be offered routinely as a birthing option. You might still think that a caesarean section remains the best choice for you and your baby, particularly if you have had a previous negative birthing experience, have complications during the pregnancy or are worried about having a vaginal birth.

If this is the case then you will be referred to a senior doctor or midwife with experience of caesarean section and vaginal birth. You will have the opportunity to discuss your birth options and any concerns you may have. The midwife or doctor will provide you with information about the relative risks and benefits of both methods of birth. In addition, you might find it helpful to have regular meetings with a healthcare professional trained to provide psychological support during pregnancy and childbirth.

Ultimately we wish to make sure that your birth is as safe as possible for you and your baby and that you have a positive birthing experience.

Further information on the NICE guidance for caesarean section, can be found at <http://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/cg132>

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