

Caesarean birth plan

You may know you're having a caesarean, or you may be doing this just in case. When the time comes, you may really appreciate having your wishes met (where possible), or you may just want to get the operation over and done with. Here are some things to think about when you're deciding what kind of experience you want. Remember, though, that some of your preferences may not be possible, depending on circumstances.

Pain relief:

- Do you want a regional anaesthetic, which numbs your belly and means you can stay awake for the operation? The sort of painkiller you'll be given is most likely to be a one-off injection called a spinal, but could also be an epidural.
- Or do you want to have a general anaesthetic, which means you'll be asleep during the operation? It's less common to have general anaesthetic for caesareans these days and they're usually only used in certain situations.

Birth partner:

- Your partner should be able to stay with you from the beginning to the end of the operation, but ...
- ... if you have a general anaesthetic, the obstetrician may not allow your partner into the operating theatre.
- If this happens, ask if your partner can be just outside the theatre door so he can hold your baby as soon as possible, if that's important to you.

Ambiance:

- Do you want a running commentary from the theatre staff about how your operation is going?
- Do you want music playing in the background to relax you and take your mind off the operation?
- Do you want the staff to be quiet so that the first voice your baby hears is yours or your partner's (bearing in mind that the medical staff may need to communicate with each other to ensure your operation goes smoothly and you and your baby are safe)?
- Do you want the lights dimmed (if it's safe to do so)?

The birth:

- Do you want the screen to be lowered or a mirror ready, so you can see your baby being born?
- Do you want the screen to be kept raised until your cut is sewn up, in case it makes you squeamish?
- If your obstetrician allows it, do you want to assist in bringing your baby up to you?
- Do you want someone to take photos or video of the birth (if permitted by the hospital)? This may be important to you if you're under a general anaesthetic.

Just after your baby is born:

- Do you want to discover the sex of your baby for yourselves, or to be told by the medical team?
- Do you want skin contact with your baby, or to wait for your baby to be cleaned before a cuddle?
- Do you want your partner to hold your baby if you're under general anaesthetic or unable to hold her?
- Do you want to breastfeed your baby as soon as you can, or your partner to bottle feed your baby while you recover?

Caring for your baby:

- Do you want to have your baby with you or your partner at all times (if possible)?
- Do you want your partner to stay with you if your baby is admitted to the special care baby unit?
- Do you want to breastfeed on demand and have help doing so, or have help with formula feeding?
- Do you want your partner or a midwife you know to introduce your baby to you if you were asleep for the birth, or if your baby has been to SCBU?