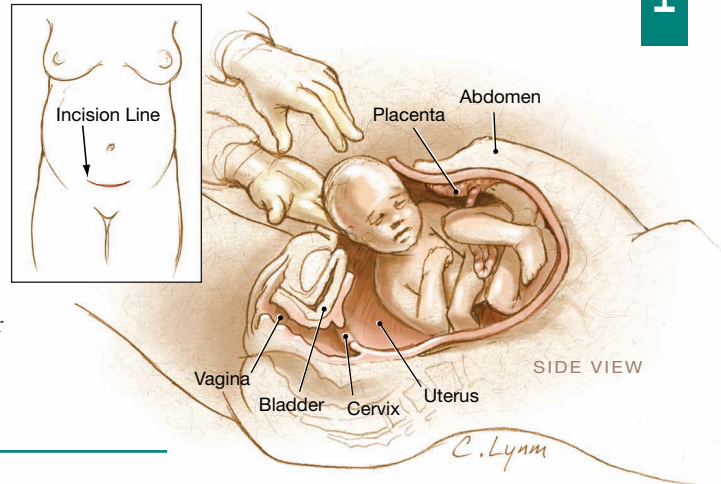


Cesarean Delivery

In a **cesarean section** or **delivery** (sometimes called **c-section**), a surgical incision is made in the mother's abdomen and **uterus** (womb) to deliver the baby. The term "cesarean" is based on the belief that the Roman emperor Julius Caesar was born in this way.

Cesarean delivery may sometimes be planned by the mother and her physician before the baby is born, or it may be decided during childbirth that it is safer for the mother or the baby. The May 22/29, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes 2 articles about cesarean delivery.



REASONS FOR CESAREAN DELIVERY

- **Size of the baby:** If a baby is very large, it might not be able to pass safely through the mother's pelvis.
- **Maternal medical conditions:** Diabetes, high blood pressure, herpes infection, or other conditions.
- **Position of the placenta:** The **placenta** (the organ that links the mother and the baby) sometimes blocks the path of exit from the uterus.
- **Multiple births:** If more than 1 baby is being born (such as the case with twins).
- **Failure of labor to progress:** Sometimes **labor** (the sharp contractions that help push out the baby) might stop before the baby is born. The doctor might wait or give medication that helps labor start again. In some cases, the baby will still need to be delivered by cesarean.
- **Health of the baby:** If the baby shows signs of distress such as an abnormal heart rate during delivery.
- **Previous cesarean birth:** The doctor may discuss with the mother that having delivered one baby by cesarean might mean it would be best to have other babies delivered by cesarean.

WHAT TO EXPECT

If your doctor does perform a cesarean delivery, the following steps will be taken to ensure your comfort and safety:

- Your abdomen will be washed and shaved before the surgery.
- A catheter (tube) will be placed in your bladder to empty it.
- A small tube will be placed in a vein of your arm or hand to provide fluids and medication during surgery.
- You will require an anesthetic for the surgery; this may be general anesthesia or regional anesthesia, such as a spinal block.
- The doctor will make incisions in the abdomen and uterus and deliver the baby through the incisions.
- The uterus will be closed with stitches that later dissolve on their own, and stitches or staples will be used to close the abdomen.
- After the delivery, you and your baby will be given a room in the hospital where you will be monitored and cared for.

Cesarean delivery is major surgery, but sometimes it is the safest way to deliver a baby.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
www.acog.org
- National Women's Health Information Center
800/994-9662
www.4woman.gov

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com.

Sources: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, National Institutes of Health, Mayo Clinic, National Library of Medicine, National Women's Health Information Center

Lise M. Stevens, MA, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 718/946-7424.

