

Caesarean Aftercare.

This week we are looking at how aftercare following a caesarean section. The situation that led to your caesarean birth can have a big impact on the way in which you recover.

Often there are higher pain levels in people who have had an emergency caesarean, which is potentially due to several factors - either the more rushed nature of the surgical intervention, the fact that the Mum may have been physically exhausted by that point after a long labour, the emotional state of her and whether she may feel distressed at the fact that her birth didn't go the way she had planned, or a combination of all three.

Some women, for a variety of reasons, end up with an infection at the wound site, or delayed healing of the stitches. And some women put more load through the new sutures than others, with caring for a toddler or needing to lift relatively heavy loads around the house, versus those who are able to rest more in those early weeks while the scar is very new and still healing.

If you have major surgery you would expect that you would receive some extra guidance and check-ups, but this is often not the case!

To start with, let's recap what is involved in the incision as it's not just one layer.

In fact, the Ob will go through the process of cutting your skin, then the fat layer, then the fascia (thick connective tissue), then they part your abdominal muscles, then cutting through the peritoneum (thinner, more delicate connective tissue layers), then your uterus, and lastly, the amniotic sac around your baby. Once your baby is born, the Ob repairs your uterus, the other internal layers, and then your outer skin. These layers of sutures may not all be in line with each other, so where you see your external scar might actually be higher or lower than where the internal scars are making a difference with your coping and healing postnatally.

Take time to understand your limitations and the kind of care that might be necessary will aid in your expectations and recovery. Keep in mind that it is normal to feel overwhelmed emotionally and physically drained as well as sore and uncomfortable.

The Do's and Don'ts following a c-section.

It is normal to want to slip into your pre-birth routine and try to get back to normal life after your baby is born. Let's be honest, no one likes feeling unable to do the things they enjoyed or could do easily before, but take things slowly and allowing your body to recover at its own pace will be the healthiest and quickest way for you to get back to your normal self.

As such there are some things you definitely should and shouldn't be doing when recovering from a c-section.

Do's

Relieve Pain:

Your LMC should advise you on what pain relief to use in the weeks after your caesarean. The most common painkillers used for c-sections are ibuprofen and paracetamol which are both readily available in supermarkets and pharmacies or ask them for a prescription for these.

Take Everything Slowly:

In the weeks after your baby is born, be sure to have a free schedule so you can rest as much as you need to. This not only gives you plenty of time to care for and bond with your new baby but takes off some of the pressure of daily life.

Care For Your Wound:

Like any surgery, after a c-section you need to ensure you take care of your wound and stitches to avoid infection and aid with healing. You can do this by making sure you keep the area dry and clean. Don't use any products on your wound without checking with your LMC first.

Drink Plenty of Water and Eat Well:

This is always important and benefits you in your every day life, but vital when you are recovering from a c-section. Keeping hydrated will ensure your body is functioning properly and eating well will give your body all the nutrients it needs to get back to normal.

Ask For Help:

Caring for a new baby is magical but also really hard. Doing so while recovering from a c-section is even more tricky. Whether it is your partner, friends, family or a professional, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. Getting help caring for your baby, doing your shopping or with tasks around the house will help to reduce your stress levels and give you more time to rest.

What to Wear:

Compression garments, activewear and comfortable clothing are ideal for this period. Things to consider are - is the fabric breathable? can I easily breastfeed in this? does it offer support and compression? is it comfortable? High-waisted compression leggings (nothing rubbing near your incision and no seams - bliss!) may be suggested by your LMC during your recovery period, this may help in reducing swelling and also help you feel supported in your tummy area.

Gentle Massage:

Very gentle massage over your scar. This can start to occur when the scar is fully healed (when you no longer have any dressings on), however, you may prefer to wait until after you've checked with your LMC. It is recommended to use a plain, unscented moisturiser that is water-based, not oil-based.

Wait a Little while Before Sex:

Most new Mumma's can have sex when you feel healed and ready, however, your LMC may suggest you wait 4 - 6 weeks depending on any other issues. Don't forget there are other ways to be intimate, and if you are worried about the pressure on your tummy, try different positions.

Don'ts

Don't Drive For 4-6 Weeks:

You should be aware that your car insurance could be affected by your c- section. Have a chat with your LMC about when you may be ok to drive again.

Don't Exercise Too Much Before You Are Ready:

After your c-section, it is important to move around as much as possible, such as going for a short walk or walking around the house. This will ease you back into physical activity without putting too much pressure on your scar and reduces your chances of blood clots. However, you shouldn't do any strenuous exercise such as running, weightlifting, circuit training, etc until your LMC clears you to do so and you feel well enough to cope with it.

Laugh, Cough or Sneeze (Impossible, But Try to Avoid It):

Laughing, coughing and sneezing can put a lot of pressure on your stomach muscles and your new stitches. As we all know, it is impossible to avoid doing these things, they are a part of daily life! A good exercise is to put a pillow over your stitches before you laugh, cough or sneeze and press it onto yourself, helping to reduce stress and pain for your abdominal muscles. Try this when you get out of a low chair or bed too.

Don't lift anything Heavy:

Lifting your baby after a c-section should be perfectly fine, but you should take it easy and if you do feel any pain or discomfort then you should lay your baby back down immediately. You must avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby for the first few weeks after your c-section, as this will put unnecessary strain on your weakened stomach muscles and can lead to complications such as bleeding, infection and a longer recovery time. When you get out of bed (and into bed) do so by rolling so you're not using your core too much.

What is not normal when it comes to a caesarean scar?

If any of these things occur they should be further assessed and managed:

- Tenderness or pain on and around the incision site more than 6 weeks after healing
- Altered sensation like pins and needles, or pain with touch (like when drying the area with a towel)
- A scar that is still red or turns purple after the 12-week mark
- A scar that is raised, lumpy or pulls inwards
- Pain (especially sharp pain) or tight pulling during stretching, physical activity or exercise
- Palpable lumps of scar tissue over or around the external scar

In a nutshell...

Most caesarean scars heal well by themselves and don't require any intervention. However, there are so many things you can proactively be doing in those early days and weeks to improve your chances of having the scar heal in a way that behaves like normal skin and doesn't cause problems.

And if you do experience ongoing pain, tightness, or symptoms that might be associated with internal scarring, remember – it's not normal for this to be the case after the first 2-3 months, and there are people who can help!

Open communication with your LMC and your support team is very important.

