

Elective caesarean section

Name:.....

Please come to the hospital birth centre, 7th Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital **on:** at 7:30am.

Please be on time as arriving late causes delays in the service.

This leaflet explains what to expect from your elective (planned) caesarean section. If you have any questions, please ask a member of staff caring for you.

What is an elective caesarean section?

A caesarean section is an operation to deliver a baby through the lower part of your abdomen (tummy). Elective means it is planned in advance and you do not go into labour. Your doctor will discuss why an elective caesarean section may be best for you and your baby. They will explain the operation to you along with any risks associated with it (for example, bleeding and developing an infection). Your elective (planned) caesarean section is usually performed when you are around 39 weeks pregnant.

What happens before I come into hospital?

You will be given a pre-assessment appointment with a midwife on either the Wednesday or Friday before your surgery. This appointment will last 30 minutes and you will receive a letter in the post confirming your appointment time and place.

During the appointment, you will need to have a blood test to check your iron levels and so that blood can be made available should you need it. You will have swabs taken for MRSA. This is a type of bacteria commonly found on our skin that is resistant to a number of widely used antibiotics. It means MRSA wound infections can be more difficult to treat than other bacterial infections. It's often carried on the skin and inside the nostrils and throat and can cause mild infections of the skin. Minor skin infections may not always require any treatment, but in most other cases it will be treated with antibiotics that MRSA has not yet developed resistance to.

You will also receive a prescription for a medicine called ranitidine. This is a tablet which counteracts the acid in your stomach. You will need to take:

- **One tablet** at 10pm on the night before your surgery
- **One tablet** at 7am on the morning of your surgery

How should I prepare for an elective caesarean section?

Before coming into hospital, it is essential to prepare yourself and your family for the arrival of your baby.

Eating and drinking

It is important not to stop eating and drinking too soon to ensure you remain well-hydrated throughout your surgery. We advise:

- You can eat and drink normally until 2am
- You can drink water, squash (**not** juice with bits in), black tea and black coffee with sugar until 7am
- Stop drinking at 7am once you have taken your second ranitidine tablet.

Preparing your skin

To reduce the risk of developing a wound infection, it is important to thoroughly clean your skin so that the amount of bacteria is reduced. A surgical wound infection occurs when germs enter the cut that the surgeon makes through your skin to deliver your baby. You can help reduce this risk by following these steps:

- 1- **Stop** shaving/waxing your pubic area/ bikini line a week before your caesarean section.
- 2- On the morning of your surgery, **before coming into hospital**, have a bath or shower and clean your bikini line and pubic area with soap and water. **Do not** apply any lotions or talcum powder to your skin after this.
- 3- Your skin will be cleaned again in theatre before your caesarean section and your wound dressing will stay on for five days following your surgery. This will be removed at home by your community midwife.
- 4- Please remove all jewellery (except your wedding ring) and leave it at home. We ask you to remove all body piercings, make up and false nails before coming into hospital.

Domestic arrangements

You can have two birth partners come into hospital with you. Please organise childcare for the length of your stay in hospital (1-2 nights if all is well). **We do not provide childcare and the hospital birth centre is not a suitable environment for children.**

We recommend bringing **one** overnight bag with you on the day of your surgery and any additional items (for example, car seats, extra clothes) can be brought in the next day. Please do not bring in any valuables, cooked food that needs reheating or cigarettes/tobacco. Smoking is not allowed in the buildings and grounds at our hospitals.

What happens on the day of my elective caesarean section?

When you arrive, you will be seen by a midwife, anaesthetist and obstetrician (a doctor specialising in pregnancy and childbirth).

- Your observations will be checked (blood pressure, pulse and temperature) and your baby's heartbeat monitored.
- You will be given elastic stockings to wear to prevent blood clots forming in your legs.
- When the team are ready, you will walk to theatre with your birth partner. **Only one birth partner will be allowed into theatre with you.**

We have two operating theatres on the maternity unit and we aim to see all women in a timely manner. However, emergencies do take priority so please bring in a book/magazine to read in case there are any delays. We will try to keep you fully informed if there are any delays.

Anaesthetic for your caesarean section

Before starting the anaesthetic, you will have an intravenous cannula (small plastic tube) inserted into a vein in your arm by the anaesthetist to give fluids and drugs such as antibiotics to prevent infection.

Most women have a spinal or epidural type anaesthetic (injection in the back). This makes the lower half of your body numb allowing you to be awake for your baby's birth. Sometimes this type of anaesthetic is difficult or not possible and we are always prepared to provide a general anaesthetic (when the patient is sent to sleep) although this is rarely needed in an elective/planned caesarean.

You may feel some pushing or pulling sensation as the baby is born, but this is not usually uncomfortable. This technique is often the safest and preferred technique for you and your baby with the added advantage of allowing you and your partner to experience the birth together. Your anaesthetist will discuss all the options and risks with you so that together you can decide which approach is right for you. For more details, please ask for a copy of our leaflet **Having an anaesthetic**.

The anaesthetist will take a few minutes to put in the spinal or epidural injection. It is not usually an uncomfortable procedure but sometimes you might feel a tingling going down one leg, like a small electric shock, lasting only a few seconds. Once the injection is complete, we will ask you to lie onto your back while tilting the bed slightly to the left. Over the next 10-20 minutes the block will gradually spread upwards.

As well as making your lower body numb it commonly causes weakness of the legs, tummy and lower chest. This is expected and the strength usually returns within six hours. You may also experience some mild shivering, dizziness, faintness, nausea and, unfortunately sometimes, vomiting. You will be in constant communication with your anaesthetist at this time and you can be given medications to help with these effects. The anaesthetist will check the block with a cold spray to ensure that it has spread as expected.

Before starting the operation, a catheter will be inserted into your bladder to empty it. This will be removed when you are able to walk around.

During your surgery

You will be awake but you will not see the operation. There is a screen in front of you and you can talk to your birth partner. It is normal to feel pulling and pressure, just not pain. If you would like to see your baby delivered we can lower the screen enough so that you can see their upper body emerging but not so that you will see any of the operation.

This is also a wonderful opportunity to take photos. We encourage delayed cord-clamping if your baby is well and we support skin-to-skin contact with your baby in theatre. Once the midwife or obstetrician has done a quick assessment and dried your baby in warm towels, we can place them on your chest for a hug and a kiss. Please be aware that theatre can be cold and we need to ensure that your baby is kept warm.

We aim to make this special moment as lovely as possible for you and your family. Please let us know if you have any special requests, such as music, and we will do our best to accommodate them. You can have one birth partner with you in theatre; however we can not allow children under 16 in theatre.

Your surgery will take about an hour but may take longer if you have any scarring from previous surgery or if there are any difficulties.

How you can help your recovery

After your caesarean section, you will stay in the hospital birth centre for about four hours. During this time, we will help with feeding, continue skin-to-skin and make sure both you and your baby remain well. Following this, you will be transferred to the postnatal ward and discharged home after one or two nights if all is well.

The measures below will help you to recover from your operation and regain your independence as quickly as possible. There is research-based evidence that early mobilisation (moving around), eating, drinking, exercise and good pain control leads to a quicker recovery. Recovery time varies from woman to woman but it generally takes six weeks to feel back to normal.

Mobilising

We aim to assist you with getting out of bed and moving around 6-8 hours after your surgery. Sensation in your legs should have recovered in this time following spinal anaesthetic. It can be uncomfortable when you first get out of bed. We will give you painkillers to take beforehand. When getting out of bed, roll onto your side and use your arms to help push up from lying to sitting. Take the time to straighten up and stand tall.

You will be seen by the women's services physiotherapy team before you are discharged from hospital. They will discuss postnatal exercise with you. Please refer to the website pogp.csp.org.uk/information-patients for further information.

Moving around soon after your operation helps the wound to heal and can help prevent blood clots, known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), forming in your legs.

Eating and drinking

You can start to drink water as soon as you feel able after the surgery. If you do not feel sick with this, you can then have a cup of tea or coffee. Usually after two hours of coming out of theatre, you can have a light meal. It is important not to eat a lot too soon after having your baby as your bowel needs time to recover following the caesarean.

Pain relief

You will be given regular painkillers following your surgery. These rarely have side effects and so we will provide them without the need for you to ask. We expect you to need some stronger medication which is offered at first after your surgery and then will be given when you ask for it.

Taking regular pain relief will enable you to care for yourself and your baby as early as possible. Please ensure you have simple painkillers (paracetamol and ibuprofen) at home ready for discharge. **The hospital will not provide these, although if you are unable to take ibuprofen we will provide an alternative.**

Wound care

Your wound will be repaired with dissolvable stitches and your wound dressing will stay in place for five days. You can shower and move freely while your wound dressing is on. Once removed, try to wear underwear that sits above your scar so it does not rub and cause unnecessary pain. You can have a bath or shower as you would do normally.

It is common for your wound to be slightly red and feel uncomfortable for the first 1-2 weeks. If your wound becomes increasingly red, you notice any offensive discharge or fresh bleeding or it is beginning to open – please contact your midwife, GP or the hospital birth centre (see contact details for the hospital birth centre below).

Contact us

To contact the hospital birth centre, please telephone **020 7188 2973**.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Leaflet number: 3638/VER3

Date published: January 2017

Review date: January 2020

© 2017 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust