

Module 3

A Closer Look at Repeat Cesareans Benefits and Risks

Making a Decision

May be Difficult

- Mothers want what is safest for the baby.
- For some it means scheduling a repeat cesarean, for most it's laboring for a VBAC.
- Given the same information about benefits and risks, mothers can make totally different choices.

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Why Do Some Mothers Choose a Repeat Cesarean?

- Planning to have a tubal ligation
- Knowing what to expect
- Perception of safety for oneself or the baby
- Convenience of scheduling a date
- Scheduling maternity leave from work
- Having their partner present at the birth
- Not having to repeat a difficult and painful labor
- Perception of having more control of the birth compared to a previous negative birth experience that ended with a cesarean

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How Do Most Mothers Make Decisions About VBAC and Repeat Cesarean?

- Most mothers tend to choose a repeat cesarean or a VBAC based on their provider's preference.¹
- The majority of physicians favor a routine repeat cesarean.²

1. Bernstein, S.N., Matalon-Grazi, S. and Rosen, B. N. (2012). Trial of labor versus repeat cesarean: are patients making an informed decision? *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 207(3), 204.e1-204.e Retrieved from , <http://www.ajog.org/article/S0002-9378%2812%2900711-9/fulltext>
2. Declercq, E.R., Sakala, C., Corry, M.P., Applebaum, S. Herrlich, A. (2013). *Listening to mothers III: Pregnancy and birth*. New York ,NY: Childbirth Connection



What are
the benefits
of a **repeat
cesarean?**

The uterine scar is **less likely to separate**

The separation of a uterine scar occurs mostly during labor.

Incidence of Uterine Rupture at Term	Per 100,000 Live Births
For planned VBAC	778
For planned elective repeat cesarean	22

Cunningham, F.G., Bangdiwala, S., Brown, S.S. et al. (2010). National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Conference Statement: Vaginal birth after cesarean: New insights. March 8-10, 2010. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 115(6), 1279-1295.

Fewer Babies Die with a Routine Repeat Cesarean

The risk that the baby will die
after 27 weeks gestation and
up to 28 days postpartum

Per 100,000 Live Births

Mothers who scheduled an
elective repeat cesarean

6

Low-risk mothers who
planned a hospital VBAC

8

1. New Jersey Hospital Association, New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, The New Jersey VBAC Task Force (June 2012). *Access to VBAC: A vision statement for new Jersey*. Retrieved from http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/professional/vbac_vision_statement.shtm

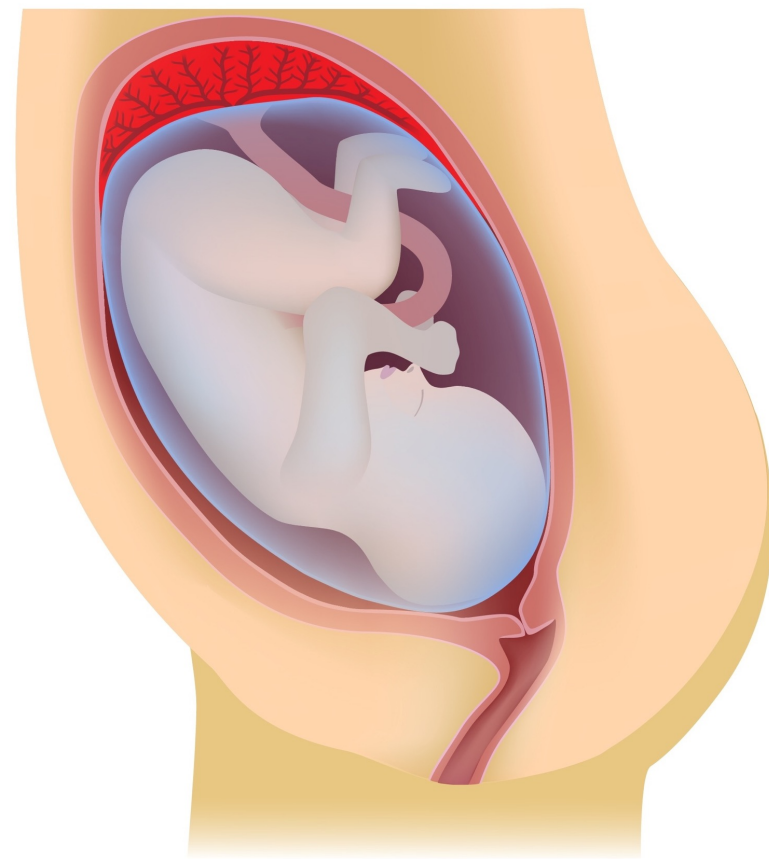
What Are the Risks of Repeat Cesareans for Mothers?

Each additional cesarean increases the odds for the following:

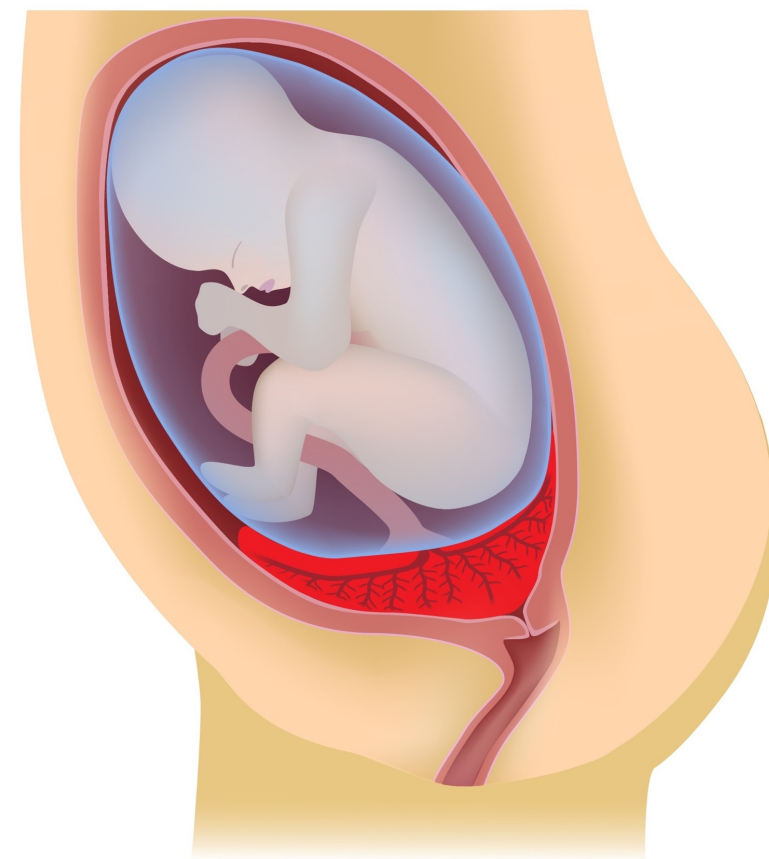
- Placenta previa;
- Placenta accreta;
- Both together, a placenta previa and accreta;
- Severe bleeding;
- A hysterectomy if the bleeding cannot be stopped;
- Needing admission to an intensive care unit.

Placenta Previa

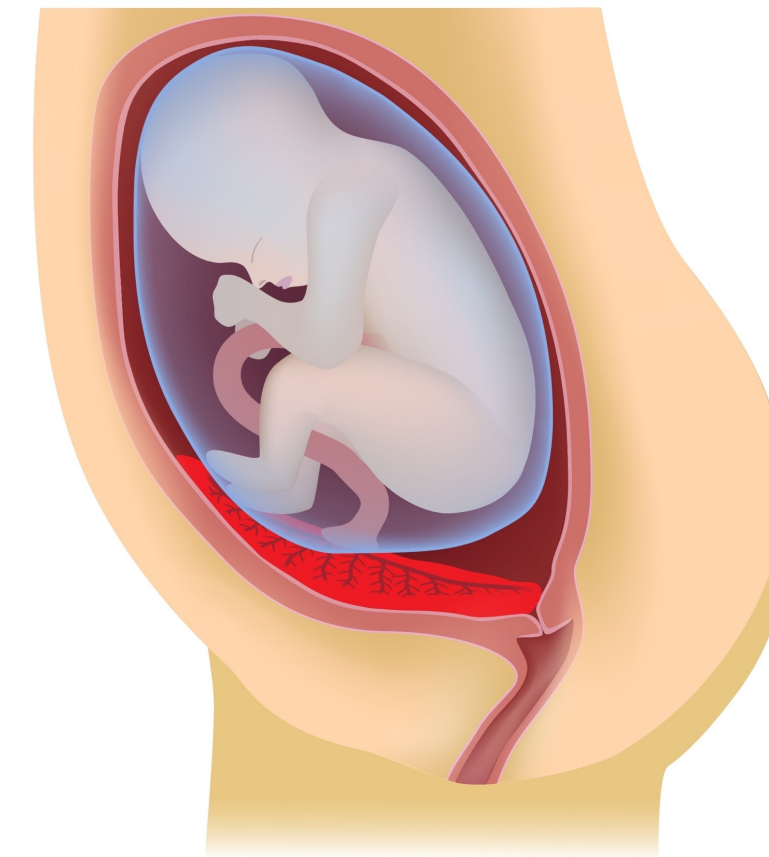
Low-Lying Placenta



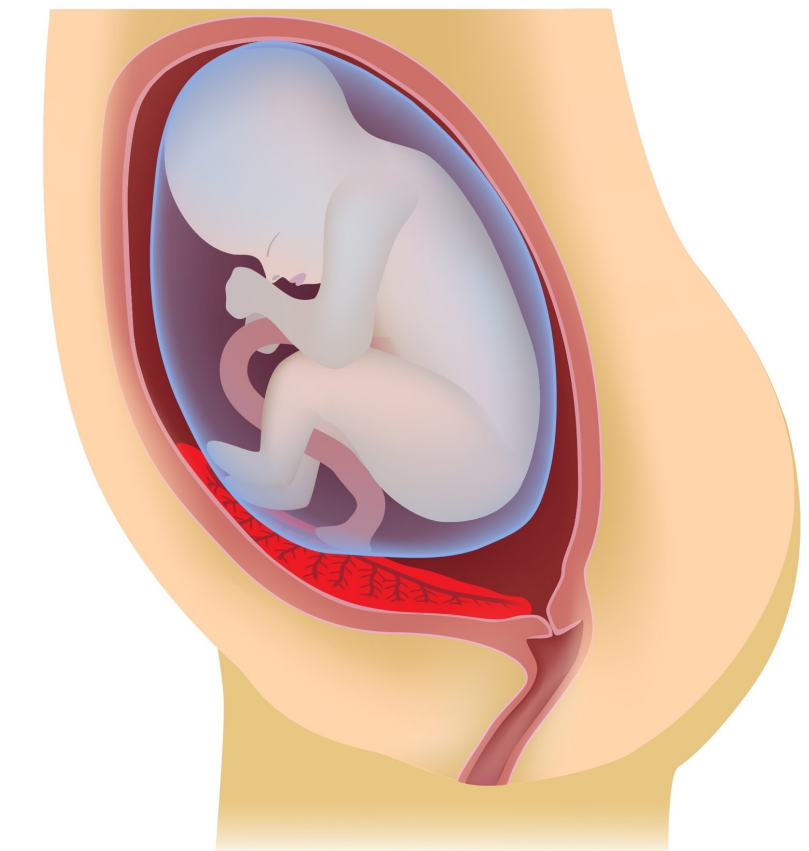
Normal



Total placenta previa



Partial placenta previa



Marginal placenta previa

What Are the Risks of Repeat Cesareans for Mothers?

Each additional cesarean increases the odds for the following:

- Needing assistance with breathing;
- The formation of a blood clot in the legs or lungs that can be life-threatening;
- Ileus (bowel obstruction);
- Surgical injuries to internal organs;
- Adhesions (internal scar tissue that forms between tissues and organs).

Each Additional Cesarean Increases the Risk for Placental Problems

Incidence of placenta previa
in women with a prior cesarean

Per 100,000 Live Births

After one cesarean section

900

After two cesarean sections

1,700

After three or more
cesarean sections

3,000

What Are the Risks of Repeat Cesareans in a Future Pregnancy?

- Difficulty becoming pregnant again
- Embryo implants in cesarean scar (cesarean scar ectopic pregnancy), a life-threatening condition
- Fetal malformations
- Preterm birth and low birth-weight

Goer, H., Romano, A., Sakala, C. (2012). *Vaginal or Cesarean Birth: What Is at Stake for Mothers and Babies? A Best Evidence Review*. New York: Childbirth Connection. Retrieved from <https://childbirthconnection.org/pdfs/vaginalorcesareanbirth.pdf>

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What Are the Short-Term Risks of Cesareans for Babies?

- Respiratory complications
- Pulmonary hypertension
- Surgical injury
- More likely to need a NICU
- Less likely to breastfeed

What Are the Long-Term Risks of Cesareans for Babies?

Emerging evidence suggests that experiencing labor and passing through the birth canal prepares babies for receiving **beneficial microorganisms** from their mothers which play a key role in the development of their immune system.



Lita M. Proctor (2013). The human microbiome: A true story about you and trillions of your closest (microscopic) friends. Retrieved from http://www.actionbioscience.org/genomics/the_human_microbiome.html

Photo, © Ron Aguilar, Flkr/Creative Commons

Human Microorganisms are Essential to Health and Well Being

- Some of these microorganisms help to produce vitamins and anti-inflammatory substances.
- Microorganisms in the gut are believed to play an important role in illnesses including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.¹
- An underdeveloped immune system may allow autoimmune diseases such as diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis to develop.²

1. U.S. National Institutes of Health, National Human Genome Research Institute. NIH Human Microbiome Project defines normal bacterial makeup of the body. Press Release, June 13, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.genome.gov/27549144>

2. Palmer, C., E. M. Bik, D.B. DiGiulio, D. A. Relman and P.O. Brown (2007). Development of the human infant intestinal microbiota. PLoS Biol. 5:e177 Retrieved from <http://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.0050177>

What Are the Long-Term Risks of Cesareans for Babies?

Babies born by cesarean are more likely to experience:

- Type I diabetes;
- Food allergies;
- Obesity;
- Allergic rhinitis;
- Asthma;
- Systemic connective tissue disorders;
- Immune deficiencies;
- Inflammatory bowel disease;
- Leukemia.

Birth by Cesarean Can Affect Breastfeeding

- Women who have a cesarean are less likely to have their babies with them skin-to-skin.
- With skin-to-skin contact babies are more likely to breastfeed early and breastfeed longer.
- With supportive care women who have a cesarean can have skin-to-skin contact with their babies after birth allowing both mother and baby to benefit from early breastfeeding.



Skin-to-Skin

Key Points to Review

- Mothers want what's best for their babies. For some mothers a repeat cesarean may be the best alternative. Mothers should be respected and supported in their decisions.
- Multiple repeat cesareans increase health risks for mothers and babies. If you are thinking about having a large family, laboring for a VBAC would reduce these risks.

Checklist for Parents: If You Will Have a Cesarean

- Wait until the end of your pregnancy. Babies need the time to fully develop.
- Ask to have your arms free so you can touch and hold your baby skin-to-skin when he is born.
- Having your baby on your chest helps to regulate his temperature and heart rate, comfort him and makes breastfeeding easier.
- Ask to have your partner and/or your doula present at the birth.
- Ask the anesthesiologist to give you pain medication that does not make you drowsy after the birth so you can enjoy being with your baby.

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Checklist for Parents: If You Will Have a Cesarean

- Try to breastfeed within the first hour or two after birth if you and the baby are stable.
- Ask for your partner, doula and baby to stay with you during recovery and in your postpartum room.
- Ask for a breastfeeding specialist if you need a little extra help.
- Take the time you need to rest, sleep or be alone until you are ready to be with your baby.



Resources for Parents

- ◎ **Birth by the Numbers**
Why Avoiding a Primary Cesarean Matters
- ◎ **Childbirth Connection**
What Every Woman Needs to Know About Cesarean Section
- ◎ **Coalition for Improving Maternity Services**
The Risks of Cesarean Section and a Checklist for Expectant Mothers
- ◎ **International Childbirth Education Association**
Skin-to-Skin Contact

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