



# Cesarean Section Recovery: The First 6 Weeks

This information will help you recover from your cesarean section (C-section) surgery. Physical therapy will help your incision heal well and help you regain strength. Your physical therapist who specializes in postpartum recovery can answer any questions you may have.

## Incision care

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### How to care for your C-section incision

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Keep your incision clean and dry to help lower your risk for infection.

Use an ice pack for pain. Apply the ice pack to your belly for 10 to 15 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day.

Avoid wearing tight underwear or pants that can irritate your incision.

Gently massage the area around your incision 3 times a day for the first 6 weeks. Use the pads of your fingertips, and with light pressure, make tiny circles about a hand-width away from the incision. Move all around your incision but do not massage directly over your incision. Your obstetrician will tell you when your incision is healed and when you are ready to do scar tissue massage.

Inspect your incision every day for signs of infection. Contact your obstetrician if you notice any of these symptoms:

- Fever of more than 100.2 degrees F
  - Foul-smelling drainage or fluid from the incision
  - Increased tenderness or soreness at the incision site
  - Incision edges that are no longer together
  - Redness or swelling at the incision site
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## Activity

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### Guidelines for activity after your C-section

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Do not lift anything heavier than your baby. Ask for help when needed.

Avoid driving during the first 2 weeks. Before driving, make sure you can brake and turn quickly if needed. Do not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medication.

When getting in and out of bed, remember to roll on to your side first. Then, use your arms to push yourself up. Swing your legs around to get into a sitting position.

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# Cesarean Section Recovery: The First 6 Weeks (continued)

## Breastfeeding

It is best to breastfeed while laying on your side. This will reduce pressure on your incision and abdominal wall.

If you sit to breastfeed, avoid a reclined position. Leaning back will cause more stress on your abdominal wall, especially where your muscles have split. Use pillows to support your back. Place pillows under your baby to bring your baby to your breast. Avoid hunching over.

## Abdominal support

To help support your abdominal muscles, wear your abdominal binder for 6 to 8 weeks after your C-section. The binder is meant to support, not flatten, your stomach. It will take the pressure off your incision while you heal.

Do not wear the binder too tightly. This can cause your pelvic organs to prolapse (move down) into your vagina. You should be able to breathe and move comfortably.

Wear the binder when moving around or standing, and especially if you are going for a walk, doing housework or running errands. You do not need to wear it when you are lying down or sitting.

## Intra-abdominal pressure precautions

Intra-abdominal pressure (IAP) is the pressure inside your abdominal cavity. Higher IAP can cause stress on your incision and abdominal muscles. Holding your breath can increase IAP.

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## Guidelines to help avoid increased IAP

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Avoid holding your breath, especially when lifting objects or going from a sitting to standing position. Try to exhale when you do movements that take more effort.

Avoid straining to have a bowel movement. Keep your stools soft. Exhale as you bear down.

Keep your mouth open as you breathe during actions that take a lot of effort.

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## Exercise

It is important to rest and restore your body the first 2 weeks after your C-section. As you start to feel better, slowly return to more activity.

## Diaphragmatic breathing

Your diaphragm is the main muscle you use for breathing. It is between your chest cavity and abdominal cavity, below your lungs. You can help your recovery by using your diaphragm correctly when you breathe. Follow these steps for diaphragmatic breathing (or "belly breathing"):

1. Take a deep breath in through your nose. Focus on expanding your rib cage in all directions, like a balloon. This will relax your pelvic muscles and expand your abdominal muscles.
2. Exhale through your mouth. This activates your core and pelvic floor muscles.

Do 20 diaphragmatic breaths 2 times a day.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your obstetrician or physical therapist who specializes in postpartum recovery. Contact Northwestern Medical Group Women's Health Physical Therapy Department at 312.926.8810, (TTY: 711).**