

Having a caesarean birth under general anaesthetic: information for birth partners

Maternity Services Patient information

Why have I been given this leaflet?

You have been given this leaflet because your partner is having a caesarean birth under general anaesthetic. We realise this may be a difficult time for you. This leaflet aims to give you information about what is taking place and why. We hope it will answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any other questions, please speak to a member of the healthcare team. You will be asked to stay in a room on our labour ward until the baby is born. You cannot go with your partner to the operating theatre. This is so the team in theatre can fully focus on looking after your partner and the baby.

While you are waiting, you may wish to call friends or family for support. You can also contact the free Baby Buddy Support Helpline. This gives support via text message any time of day or night. Text **BABYBUDDY** to **85258**, see www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/baby-buddy-support-service, or access this support via the Baby Buddy app.

What is a caesarean birth?

A caesarean birth is an operation to birth the baby. A cut is made in your partner's abdomen (tummy) and womb. The cut is made across your partner's abdomen, just below their bikini line. A caesarean birth can be planned. This is called an elective caesarean birth. Sometimes a caesarean needs to be done unexpectedly. This is called an emergency caesarean birth. This can be due to complications during labour, or if there is an urgent need for your baby to be born before labour starts.

Your partner may need an emergency caesarean birth if:

- there are concerns about the baby and they need to be born quickly
- there are concerns about your partner's wellbeing
- your partner's labour hasn't progressed as expected

Your partner is having a general anaesthetic for their caesarean birth.



This means they are put to sleep for the operation. This is because staying awake and having a caesarean birth under regional anaesthetic (spinal block or epidural) wasn't possible for them.

Reasons why a general anaesthetic may be needed include:

- an emergency when the baby needs to be born quickly
- when regional anaesthetic is not possible because of your partner's health
- when regional anaesthetic has been tried but is not fully working



What will happen to my partner?

A team will be ready to meet your partner in our operating theatre.

An anaesthetist will give your partner the anaesthetic medicine through a cannula.

This is a thin plastic tube, usually in the back of the hand. This will send them to sleep.

They will stay asleep for the operation. They won't move, feel pain, or be aware of what's happening. This means your partner won't remember the baby's birth.

Each caesarean birth is different and timings can vary. The operation will normally last around 40 minutes in total. The baby is generally born within the first 10 minutes. It then takes around 30 minutes to finish the operation. We will update you on your partner and baby's wellbeing as soon as we can. Please speak to a member of the labour ward team if you have any questions or concerns.



At the end of the operation, the anaesthetist will turn off the anaesthetic medicine. Your partner will slowly wake up. They will then be moved to the recovery area. They will still feel sleepy for a short while after waking up. They may feel sick because of the anaesthetic. They may also have a sore throat. This is because a breathing tube will have been placed in their throat when they were under anaesthetic. They will be offered pain relief to help ease any discomfort. Once they are well enough, your partner will be moved to a room on the labour ward. You will then be able to join them.

A caesarean is major abdominal surgery. Your partner will need support from you in their recovery period. They will need to avoid heavy lifting. They may even struggle to pick up the baby at first. You can help by passing them baby and reaching drinks etc. You and your partner may feel a range of emotions after having a caesarean birth. It is important to talk about what you are feeling. There is plenty of support available. Speak to your midwife, health visitor, or GP if either of you are struggling.



What will happen to the baby?

When the baby is born, we normally wait for a minute before cutting their umbilical cord. This will help the baby adapt to life out of the womb. It also reduces their risk of having a low blood count (anaemia). A member of the neonatal team will be there to check the baby's wellbeing. As soon as it is safe, we will take some photos of the baby if you and your partner would like us to. We can either use your own phone or our hospital iPad (in which case we can upload these to Badgernet for you).

If the baby is well

If the baby is well and we have your partner's permission, we will bring the baby to you. You will then have the chance to hold and cuddle the baby against your skin if you wish to. Skin-to-skin contact has benefits to both you and the baby. These include helping to control their body temperature, blood sugar, heart rate, and breathing.

If the baby needs some extra help and support

Our neonatal team will support the baby's breathing when they are born. If they need ongoing support, then we may move the baby to our neonatal unit. We will place them in an incubator or heated cot. We will try to let you see the baby before they are moved. This is not always possible.

You will be able to visit the baby in the neonatal unit once they have been settled in. This normally takes one to two hours. Once your partner is well enough, they will also be able to visit the baby. The neonatal team will involve you as much as possible in the baby's care. They will explain the reason for any treatment, seek your consent, and will be happy to answer any questions.

Further information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/caesarean-section

www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/baby-buddy-support-service

www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/giving-birth/caesarean-section/c-section-tips-dads-and-partners

www.thedadpad.co.uk

This information sheet has been adapted from a resource used by University Hospital Southampton. We are grateful to them for sharing this resource with us.



The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW
Poole Hospital, Longfleet Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 2JB

Author: **Dr Melanie Hosken** and **Dr Caroline Fortescue**

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