



# The birth

Two ways a baby may be born:

1. Through the vagina (vaginal birth). Contractions of the uterus push the baby out through the cervix into the vagina. The baby passes through the vagina to enter the world.
2. Cesarean section (C-section). This is a surgical method. The baby is taken directly from the uterus.

The type of delivery you have will depend on your needs. Discuss the options with your health care provider.



## VAGINAL BIRTHS

Natural childbirth means that no medication is given to induce (bring on) labor. Little or no medicine is given to relieve pain. The mother uses various methods to aid the delivery process, like special breathing. Her “coach” provides support.

Vaginal births can also involve medicines. Some of these are:

- **Misoprostal.** This tablet is put in through the vagina to help dilate the cervix.
- **Pitocin.** This is a hormone that causes the uterus to contract. It helps to start or speed up labor. It is given through an IV (intravenous drip).
- **Prostaglandin gel.** This is a gel that is put in through the vagina. It goes right on the cervix. It can help dilate the cervix. It also causes the uterus to contract. This helps to start labor.
- **Narcotic pain relievers.** Example: Demerol. These can be given with a shot or an IV. They take the edge off pain. But they can also cause you to feel drowsy or dizzy. They can cause an upset stomach or throwing up. Other medicines may be given with narcotic pain relievers. These help them have a stronger effect.
- **Tranquilizers.** These relax you if you are tense and anxious. They can be given in pills or with a shot. Tranquilizers are sometimes used with pain relievers.

- **Local anesthetics.** These cause a loss of feeling where they are applied. Common examples:
  - *Pudendal block.* A shot numbs the nerves in the vaginal area. It is usually given when the cervix is fully dilated (opened). It may be used with a pain reliever or tranquilizer.
  - *Epidural block.* A shot is given in the back to numb the area. A thin plastic tube is put into the epidural space of the spine. Medicine is given through the tube. This causes some loss of feeling from the waist down. An epidural block can have other effects. It can lower the mother’s blood pressure. It can make her unable to pass urine on her own. An epidural block can also increase the chance that forceps will be used at delivery. **{Note:** Just pain medicine can be given through the tube. It does not cause a loss of feeling from the waist down.}
- **General anesthesia.** This puts the mother to sleep. It is used most often for emergency C-sections. But it can be used in a vaginal birth when the baby is in a breech position. That’s when the baby’s bottom or one or both feet reach the cervix before the head does.



## CESAREAN BIRTHS (C-SECTIONS)

A C-section requires anesthetics. Either an epidural block or spinal is used. General anesthesia is rarely used. C-sections are usually done with a low, left-to-right incision (cut) near the line of pubic hair. This is called a lower-segment incision or a “bikini” cut. An up-and-down incision is rare these days. But it may be used in an emergency. The type of incision in the skin may be different from the one made in the uterus.

C-sections may or may not be planned. Here are some reasons for doing one:

- The baby (or babies) or mother is not doing well.
- The baby is too big for the mother’s pelvis.
- The mother has placenta previa or placenta abruptio.
- The mother had a past C-section with an up-and-down incision on the uterus.
- The baby is lying in a way that makes it hard to deliver.
- The mother has an active outbreak of genital herpes.

- Labor does not progress the way it should.
- The umbilical cord is wedged between the cervix and the baby. This cuts off blood flow to the baby.
- The mother is not strong enough for a vaginal delivery.
- The mother has health problems, like diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease, or preeclampsia.
- The baby is more than 2 weeks late and the placenta does not nourish the baby well.



## VAGINAL BIRTHS AFTER C-SECTION (VBAC)

Some pregnant women have already had a C-section delivery. Of this group, some might be able to have a safe vaginal delivery. Some might not for the next baby.

A vaginal delivery after a C-section may be possible if:

- The incision for the C-section was the left-to-right, lower-segment type.
- Your pelvis is normal size.
- Reasons for the past C-section are not present now. Examples:
  - Breech baby
  - Separation of the placenta (placenta abruptio)
  - More than one baby
  - Baby in distress