

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Women who have had a prior cesarean section may be candidates for future vaginal deliveries. Talk with your healthcare provider about this if you are interested in learning more.

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Plain Language Summary:

Women who have had a prior cesarean section may be able to deliver vaginally. Multiple considerations must be discussed before this decision can be made. A procedure called VBAC (vaginal birth after cesarean) has been performed on many women who have previously delivered a child or children through cesarean section.

If you have had a previous vaginal birth or a previous VBAC you may have a successful future VBAC. If you have any of the following you are at increased risk for having an unsuccessful VBAC: induced labour, no previous vaginal birth, BMI > 30, previous C section for dystocia, VBAC at or after 41 weeks gestation, birth weight > 4 kg, no epidural anesthesia, previous preterm caesarean birth, advanced maternal age, non-white ethnicity, short stature, and male infant.

Other risks to the woman or fetus include: uterine rupture, perinatal death, hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy (HIE). However, there may be benefits to the woman or fetus including: preferred method of delivery, decreased risk for respiratory issues in baby, avoidance of cesarean section. Every 72-76 women out of 100 who undergo planned VBAC have successful deliveries with good outcomes, meaning, no cesarean section, no uterine rupture, no perinatal death, and no HIE.

There are certain contraindications to VBAC. They include: previous uterine rupture, previous high vertical classical caesarean section where uterine incision involves the entire length of the uterine corpus, and 3 or more caesarean sections. Your doctor can help determine if any of these contraindications apply to you.

The decision of how to deliver your baby is an important one and can be affected by many factors. Some women choose VBAC because of the shorter recovery time, or the desire to participate more in the birth process. This decision should be determined by you and your physician after some discussion. Share your preferences and concerns with your healthcare provider and ask about all of your delivery options, including whether VBAC is a possibility for you. There may be additional limitations depending upon the location of your planned delivery, for example, if an OB/GYN will be on-call during delivery.

Additional Resources:

Medline Plus:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/vbac/MY01143/PAGE=all&METHOD=print>

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists:
<http://www.acog.org/~media/For%20Patients/faq070.ashx>

Key Words:

VBAC; vaginal birth after cesarean; prior cesarean; c-section

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.