

**NHS Forth Valley**

# **A Guide to Giving Birth After Caesarean Section**

**Your Options for Care**

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of two overlapping, stylized blue waves. The top wave is light blue and the bottom wave is a slightly darker shade of blue. They are positioned horizontally across the bottom of the page, with the bottom wave appearing to rise from the left and curve towards the right, while the top wave is positioned above it, also curving towards the right.

# Vaginal Birth after Caesarean Section (VBAC)

This leaflet has been designed to give you information on vaginal birth after caesarean section (VBAC).

For many women who have previously given birth by caesarean section, vaginal birth in the next pregnancy is a safe option. In Forth Valley we encourage all suitable women who have previously given birth by Caesarean Section to consider a vaginal delivery in a subsequent pregnancy.

Most women (3 out of 4) who have previously had one Caesarean Section, who have a straight forward pregnancy and go into labour themselves, successfully give birth vaginally.

## Why have a VBAC?

Having a vaginal birth after caesarean section has many advantages for you and your baby.

- You do not require surgery
- Recovery time is quicker
- Your baby is less likely to experience breathing difficulties at birth
- You have much lower chance of complications such as deep venous thrombosis (clots in legs or lungs)
- There is a greater chance of having an uncomplicated normal birth in future pregnancies
- Repeat Caesarean Sections increase the risk in subsequent pregnancies of stillbirth, miscarriage, placenta previa and morbidly adherent placenta (placenta accrete/percreta).

## Labour

While the risks of VBAC are less with a caesarean section, you do require additional care and monitoring in labour. We recommend that VBAC should be undertaken in hospital with access to obstetric and anaesthetic help in case problems arise. It is recommended that your baby's heartbeat is recorded continuously throughout your labour with a CTG. You can still be active and mobile.

Your midwife will discuss your birth plan with you in the antenatal period, advising you on options for pain relief, which can include an epidural if you wish.

## Benefits for your baby

Attempting VBAC reduces the risk of your baby having breathing problems after birth. 3-4% of babies born by planned repeat Caesarean Section compared to 2-3% following VBAC. To reduce this problem planned C/S are delayed until after 39 weeks gestation.

Risk of laceration (knife cut) is 2% for babies born by caesarean section. These are usually very minor and generally heal well.

## Risks with VBAC

Although VBAC is recommended, there are some risks; these are when:

- Chance of having a successful vaginal birth less likely
- A further caesarean section may be required in labour
- Very rarely the scar on the uterus weakens and can open (this is called scar rupture) studies have shown that scar rupture can occur in up to 7 out of every 1000 women who plan to have a vaginal birth after caesarean section
- With a VBAC there is a 1% higher chance of blood transfusion or infection in the uterus compared to a planned caesarean delivery
- The risks to your baby (dying or serious complications within the first week of life), is similar in VBAC and women having their first baby 2-3 in 10,000).

## Induction of labour (IOL) and VBAC

Ideally labour should start on its own as this gives the highest chance of vaginal birth and is linked with fewest complications.

You can safely wait until past your due date to give you the best chance of going into labour on your own. If you do require IOL, the safest option is using a "Cook's balloon catheter". This is placed through the neck of the womb and helps stretch the cervix. You will get full information on this if it is suggested and any decision about IOL will be fully discussed between you and your Consultant Obstetrician.

## Your care

Your team midwife and consultant obstetrician will discuss the risks and benefits, aiming to provide all the information you need to make a plan of care for your pregnancy and birth.

# Sources and Acknowledgements

This information is based on the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) guideline *Birth after Previous Caesarean Birth* (published by the RCOG in October 2015) and RCOG patient information leaflet *Birth after Previous Caesarean Information for You* (published by the RCOG in July 2016).

## Patient Appointments/Cancellations

If you have an enquiry about an appointment or need to cancel it, please call 01324 566248.

### If you can't go let us know!

Every month around 2,000 people across Forth Valley fail to turn up for hospital appointments. This costs the NHS millions of pounds each year and increases waiting times. So if you are unable to attend or no longer require your hospital appointment please let us know so we can offer it to someone else.

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Re-order Ref: PIL/1066/WCCS

Review Date: 2020