

Breastfeeding After a Caesarean Delivery

In many Chinese hospitals, the caesarean section rate exceeds 40%, and in some hospitals, it is as high as 80%! Usually, the method of birth is decided by your doctor, depending on the circumstances surrounding the birth. However, in some areas in China, caesarean delivery on maternal request is quite common. If you had hoped to have a natural birth, you might be disappointed if you end up with a c-section, or even have the feeling that you have “failed”. You may wonder whether breastfeeding is still going to work out for you and your baby. First of all, there is no reason to blame yourself. The important thing is that you and your baby are healthy! Be flexible to meet your baby’s needs. A c-section can make initiating breastfeeding a bit more difficult, but there is no reason that nursing can’t be successful. In this handout information about the challenges of breastfeeding after a c-section and how to overcome these.

Apply Basic Breastfeeding Principles

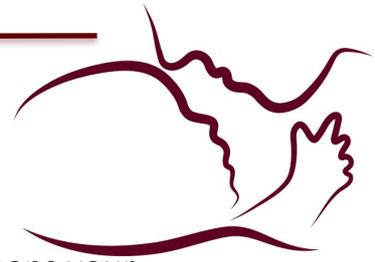
The basic principles for breastfeeding that apply for all babies, also apply for a baby that has been born by c-section. ([Read handout “Starting up Breastfeeding.”](#)) Therefore:

- Put the baby to the breast as soon after birth as possible.
- Hold the baby skin-to-skin right after birth and continue to do so regularly in the days, and weeks to follow.
- Unrestricted breastfeeding, both day and night, 8-12 times per day.
- Assure the baby is correctly latched on.
- Rooming in.
- No use of pacifier or artificial nipples in the first six weeks.
- No food or other drink than breast milk, unless medically indicated.

After a c-section, applying these basic principles can be more of a challenge. What are some things to consider to help you overcome these challenges?

Skin-to-skin Contact and Breastfeeding Right after Birth

Skin-to-skin holding and nursing as soon as possible after the birth has many advantages and is as important after a c-section as after a vaginal birth. However, this may be harder after a c-section because you may need some extra time to recover before you physically feel like holding and nursing your baby. Some Chinese hospitals will require you to lie flat on your back for at least six hours after a c-section. After surgery, you might be restricted in your movements as some hospitals use equipment like a nasal cannula for oxygen



supply, blood pressure monitor, IV drip, urinary catheter, etc. Perhaps your family is there to help you as you return to the ward. They probably want to make sure no one disturbs you, not even your own baby. This can make it harder for mothers and babies to have skin-to-skin contact and to start breastfeeding soon after a c-section. There are a few things to keep in mind to help you in this situation:

- Did you know you can hold your baby and start breastfeeding as soon as you are fully conscious and alert? This may be sooner if you had an epidural, rather than general anesthesia.
- If possible, discuss the options of general versus epidural anesthesia with your doctor. Even if general anesthesia is used and putting the baby to the breast is delayed, you can make up for lost time once you are together.
- In some hospitals your baby can enjoy skin-to-skin contact while you are still in the operating room. If this is not possible, your partner can hold your baby skin-to-skin until your surgery is completed. Studies show that babies feed better if they have been held skin-to-skin uninterrupted until the first feeding.
- Start breastfeeding before the epidural wears off. This has the advantage of being pain free and more comfortable as you give your baby his first feeding at the breast. Have someone nearby to keep an eye on you and the baby, as both of you may still be groggy from the medication.

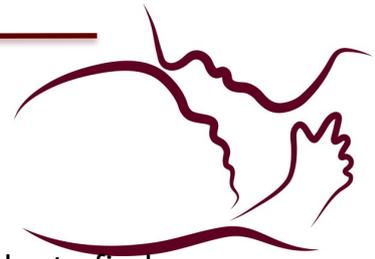
Continue to Feed Frequently

Your milk may be a bit slower to “come in” due to the surgery. Feed frequently (at least 8-12 times per day) and assure that your baby is feeding effectively. (Read handout “Does My Baby Get Enough to Eat?”) If your baby has been exposed to anesthetics for a longer period of time, he may be a bit drowsy or lethargic. Your baby may need some extra encouragement and stimulation to latch to the breast and to stay alert during the feedings. This period of lethargy usually only lasts a short time.

Allow Time for Recovery and Rest

A c-section is major surgery, so your body will need time to recover. It is therefore important to allow yourself time for recovery and rest. Try to take it easy, limit visitors, get as much rest as possible and gladly accept all the help you can get. Do take pain medication in order to stay as comfortable as possible. This will help with recovery. Most medications for pain relief will not harm your baby. Ask your doctor for advice.

Find a Comfortable Position to Nurse



The surgical incision can cause discomfort and pain, making it harder to find a comfortable position to nurse. Below some positions that might work for you:

Baby on top: If you have to nurse lying on your back, ask your partner or a nurse to help you position the baby lying face down across your chest with his legs off to the side so they are not resting on your incision. Use lots of pillows around you to help with support.

Once you can turn over, try turning on your side and breastfeed in a **side-lying position**. It is an easy way to breastfeed and rest at the same time:

- Carefully roll to one side.
- Use two pillows to support your head and keep your breasts on the bed.
- To protect the incision, put a small pillow or rolled up towel next to the incision.
- Place a pillow between your legs to minimize strain on your stomach muscles.
- Turn the baby completely onto his side, facing your body, “belly to belly”. Draw his feet close to your body.
- The baby’s nose should be opposite your nipple, so that he has to “reach up” slightly to latch.
- Use pillows to support your back.



Another position that may be comfortable after a c-section is the **football hold**. Tuck the baby under your arm. Let him rest on a pillow. Use your arm to support his back, hold your hand behind his ears. Make sure the baby is at breast height with his nose opposite your nipple. Tuck a pillow or rolled blanket under your wrist for support.



Seek Help

Don't hesitate to seek help from a knowledgeable nurse or lactation consultant.

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only.

It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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