



C - SECTION RECOVERY GUIDE

by Lola&Lykke



L O L A & L Y K K E ®

Let's get one thing straight: Birth is hard, period.

No matter how your baby enters this world, don't forget the fact that you gave birth and grew a tiny human inside your body for nine long months!

But if you had, or about to have, a C-section, you may want to take extra good care of yourself for a speedy and healthy recovery. This guide will walk you through what to expect before the procedure, how your body heals from the surgery, FAQs and more.



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What happens during a C-Section

1. How long does the procedure take?

In the case of an emergency C-section, where the mum or baby's health might be at risk, it takes about two minutes to go from incision to delivery. An emergency C-section usually happens when the mum has been in labor for too long, and the doctor has seen some possible issues like problems with the placenta or umbilical cord or maybe the baby is too large to fit through the birth canal.

A planned C-section usually takes between 10-15 minutes. Both types of C-sections will include about 45 minutes of delivering the placenta and suturing of the incisions after delivery.

2. What will happen after the surgery?

You can expect to spend at least three days in the hospital following a C-section, although some women may need to stay longer.





On the first day after the delivery, you'll likely receive a low dosage of morphine to manage your pain. You will be very tired, groggy, and possibly nauseated. Heavy bleeding is common, prepare to go through many menstrual pads. Your incision site may be itchy. You might have to wait 24 hours or until you pass gas before you can eat, as the doctors will want to be sure that your intestines are functioning healthily. A nurse will teach you how to cough safely and will show you how to do exercises which help to expand and clear the lungs.

On the second day, you may transition to an oral painkiller. The catheter will be removed, and you will need to walk to the bathroom. It is good to be on your feet for a while at this stage, with some help from a nurse or family member. Your intestines will be doing a lot of "waking up" and you may feel strange sensations in your gut.

On or around the third day, you'll be discharged from the hospital. If you don't feel physically prepared yet, you can ask to be reevaluated and stay in the hospital until you're confident that you can safely return home.

3. What will happen after you leave the hospital?

You'll likely be given a prescription for pain meds and a stool softener before you leave the hospital. You may need prescription painkillers for up to a week after surgery, gradually transitioning to over-the-counter pain relievers. If you're breastfeeding, don't take aspirin or drugs containing acetylsalicylic acid. Drink plenty of fluids to help you avoid constipation. Your incision will likely feel better day-by-day, quite noticeably so after several days, though it may continue to be tender for several weeks.

Call your caregiver if you have signs of an infection, including:

- Warmth, redness, swelling, or oozing at the incision site
- Worsening pain or sudden onset of pain
- Any fever (even if your incision looks fine)
- Foul smelling vaginal discharge
- Pain or burning when urinating, the urge to pee frequently when not a lot comes out, or urine that is dark and scanty or bloody
- Menstrual-type bleeding that continues past the first four days after delivery
- If you have any signs of a blood clot, such as severe or persistent pain or tenderness and warmth in one area of your leg, or one leg that is more swollen than the other



Week-by-week recovery

A C-Section is major surgery, and during the healing process you may experience itching, numbness, constipation, sexual discomfort, or delayed milk flow. So, make sure to give your body enough time to heal, and be gentle with yourself.

Week 1

The first week after your C-section you can expect to feel some **numbness and soreness at the incision site**. It's normal for your scar to be slightly raised, puffy, and even darker than your normal skin tone, so don't be alarmed. Make sure to support the incision site and abdomen when you cough, sneeze, or laugh by bracing your abs (imagine pulling your belly button to your spine) or by applying gentle pressure to the incision site with your hand.

For the first few weeks after giving birth, you'll have **vaginal discharge called lochia**, which consists of blood, bacteria, and sloughed-off tissue from the lining of your uterus, along with normal bleeding. This is true for women who deliver by C-section or vaginally. The discharge will be bright red for the first couple of days.

You might have some **gas pain and bloating** during the first two days. Gas tends to build up because the intestines are sluggish after surgery. Getting up and moving around will help your digestive system get going again.

You will be encouraged to get out of bed at least a couple of times after surgery, to walk around and get your blood pumping. Try wiggling your feet, rotating your ankles, or moving and stretching your legs. Make sure to **keep moving** around to keep your blood circulating to avoid chances of developing blood clots.

It's also important that you **urinate regularly**. A full bladder makes it harder for your uterus to stay contracted and increases pressure on your C-section wound.

Your discharge and bleeding will diminish, but both can last up to six weeks. Discharge and bleeding should gradually turn from bright red to pink and then yellow-white. If menstrual-type bleeding continues past the first four days after delivery or comes back after slowing, call your healthcare provider.

Immediately call your doctor if you have any signs of a blood clot, including severe or persistent pain or tenderness and warmth in one area of your leg, or one leg that is more swollen than the other.

Week 2 - Week 6

Your body needs to heal and recover during this time. For the first 6 weeks postpartum, you should focus on **very light movement** such as walking, stretching and restorative exercises for your pelvic floor.

You can gradually increase activity at a pace that feels good to you. Start with a short five-minute walk. Once you feel comfortable with that time and distance, extend your walk to 10 or 15 minutes.



PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISE

Every time you lift your baby, **tighten your pelvic floor muscles and lower tummy muscles at the same time.** This will help you protect your back and will prevent you from leaking urine.

In the early days, you can reprogram your core to function from the diaphragm down through the trunk to the pelvic floor muscles by practicing your core breathing from a supine position, and when comfortable, in a seated position.



CORE BREATHING

Core breathing is simple. When you inhale, feel your ribcage, belly, and pelvic floor expand and gently relax. Then on your exhale breath, purse your lips (like you are blowing through a straw) and gently exhale to encourage activation through the pelvic floor and deep abdominal muscles.

Before doing any activity (even before picking up your baby), pull in your abdomen, exhale your core breath, get deep tension and support in the pelvic floor, and then begin the movement or lift.

Week 6+

Your healing process is not done just because you hit the six-week mark. Getting “cleared” for exercise by your doctor, does not mean that your body is completely healed from pregnancy and delivery. Start with exercises that help you build a strong foundation and slowly tone and flatten your tummy. And then when you’re ready and able, ease yourself back into light weight training exercises and sprints.

Just remember, the effects of pregnancy hormones can affect your joints for up to six months after birth, so stay away from high-impact activities.

Postnatal exercises

After pregnancy, you're probably eager to get your post-baby body back in shape. But before jumping into your usual ab workouts, there are some special considerations that new moms need to take into account:

- Start small and slow
- Monitor your bleeding or better yet wait for it to stop
- Monitor your pelvic floor
- Check if you have diastasis recti and repair it first
- Allow your C-Section incision heal
- Be aware of wobbly joints as the prenatal hormone Relaxin is still within your system for 8 weeks postpartum
- Always stay hydrated
- Rest, rest and rest
- Stop if you feel any pain and, if in doubt, call your GP or nurse

With that in mind, here are some safe postnatal exercises that you can try to kick-start your physical recovery:

1. Kegels

To activate your pelvic floor, imagine you are stopping the flow of urine. Hold muscles for 10 seconds (don't hold your breath) and slowly release. Do 20 holds 5 times a day. This exercise can be done while sitting or standing—even when nursing!

2. Pelvic tilts

Lie on your back with your knees bent as in a glute bridge stance. Lift your hips off the ground until your knees, hips and shoulders form a straight line. Tighten your abdominal muscles by pulling in and imagining your belly button moving toward your spine. Hold your bridged position for a couple of seconds before easing back down.

3. Abdominal bracing

Abdominal bracing is simply tensing (contracting) the abs as if you are about to be hit in the stomach. Bracing involves contracting your deep abdominal muscles by gently drawing in the abdominal muscles below your belly button toward your spine and up slightly, holding this position for as long as you comfortably can. Make sure not to pull in the muscles too hard. If you notice yourself holding your breath, check your technique and ensure you keep breathing comfortably during the exercises.



4. Abdominal bracing in a chair

One exercise that places minimal strain on your back is to sit on a chair, bracing your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles as you slowly lift one leg (not too high). Try not to move your hips or body and be sure that you feel no downward strain on your pelvic floor. Breathe normally as you do this, and then lower. Build up to 10 repetitions on each side, making sure you do each one well.

Learn more about safe exercises after pregnancy [here](#).

Support garment

Diastasis Recti

The rectus abdominis are the two parallel muscles running vertically on your front beginning at the pubic bone and ending at the sternum. They are responsible for your posture. In between the two muscles, there is the linea alba, connective tissue seam which accommodates the growing baby by stretching during pregnancy. Normally the connective tissue is about 2,7cm in width and is responsible of keeping your abdominal muscles together, also providing stability to your core. A condition called Diastasis Recti occurs when the connective tissue does not shrink back properly during post-birth recovery.

Intra-abdominal pressure from ab workout can also worsen the diastasis, or gap, by injuring your abdominal muscles.

A [belly wrap](#) may be able to help repair your diastasis recti by gently pushing separated abdominal muscles back together. It is safe to wear right after your C-Section, and helps support your weakened core muscles after pregnancy.

Lola&Lykke® Core Restore Support Band is recommended by physiotherapists for new mums.

It boosts your physical recovery, reduces appearance of “mummy tummy”, and avoids potential long-term problems with your back, posture and abdomen.

[Learn more](#)



Heal your emotional scars, too

Becoming a mother leaves all of us with scars. Some of them are emotional, some of them are physical. C-section mamas often have both. And yet their scars are powerful reminders of the strength and bravery they possessed when bringing their children into the world.

Your birth story is uniquely yours

Perhaps you planned to give birth in a pool, in nature, or at a natural birth center. Part of healing from a C-section means letting go of what you thought your “ideal” labor would look like. No matter what your birth plan was or how it turned out, **don't let anyone tell you that bringing a life into this world isn't a big deal.** You survived months of growing a baby and had major surgery.

Maybe you were scared, maybe you were relieved, or maybe you didn't have time to think about how it would impact you. No matter what, you should be proud of yourself.





Your emotions are valid

You are likely to have the range of emotions common to most mothers during the postpartum period, regardless of how they gave birth. Postpartum blues are common, whether you had a Caesarean section or a vaginal birth, generally beginning a few days after delivery and lasting for a few days.

Ask your doctor or midwife, your partner, or the nurses questions about your C-section, which can help explain why the surgery was necessary. It's important to realize that **these feelings need to be dealt with just as much as the physical healing.**

Some women don't feel negative about their C-Section, and that's one part of the range of normal as well. It's neither right nor wrong to feel either way, but it's important to remember that both sides are valid and that we need to support the new mom, no matter how she feels.

However, if negative feelings don't go away on their own in the first few weeks or you find that you're feeling worse rather than better, be sure to call your caregiver with your symptoms. You may be suffering from postpartum depression. *If you think you might hurt yourself or your baby, seek professional help immediately.*

Be gentle with yourself

A long C-section recovery can be frustrating. Remember that just healing from surgery takes a significant amount of time and energy. Add to that all the postpartum changes your body is going through — along with your new round-the-clock parenting responsibilities — and you're bound to be in less-than-top condition for a while. Try to cut yourself some slack and be patient. In time, you'll be feeling better and enjoying life with your new baby.

FAQs

1. Is it difficult to sit up after a C-section?

It's one of the most surreal feelings to try and sit up on your own after having a C-section. Immediately after and up to two weeks after your C-section, it can be painful to sit up on your own. While you're in the hospital, take advantage of the hospital bed, which can help prop you up, and the nursing staff. When you get home try rolling on your side, use pillows to prop yourself up and ask family members for help getting up.

2. What is the best way to take care of my incision after C-section?

Following your Caesarean section, the incision should be kept dry and covered for 24h post-op. After that you can gently wet the incision and shower yourself. The treatment for a surgical wound is keeping it clean through gentle showers and allowing it to air. The showering promotes blood circulation which enables the incision to heal faster. Additionally, it is crucial to keep the wound clean and hydrated, and prevent bacterial infection. You can gently pat the incision site dry with a clean towel after your shower.

Pain in and around the incision site is common and can be managed with painkillers. In the hospital you might be given stronger pain relief, but once you are back home the pain should be relievable with oral painkillers. Your doctor might have prescribed you some or advised you to take over the counter medicine. Keep in mind to steer away to acetylsalicylic acid, or more commonly known as "aspirin" based products.

Movement promotes healing after a C-section, just like following any other surgery. However, be mindful of your technique: practice getting up from bed, for example. First, roll to your side and with the support of your hands, slowly get up. This provides least pressure on your abdominal incisions.

The incision may have been closed with sutures or with staples. They will be removed approximately 1-week post-operation. You will not have to stay in hospital for that duration, and a nurse can remove them. Sometimes the sutures used have been sown inside the wound, in which case they will dissolve by themselves. Some redness around the stitches or staples is normal and is usually not an indication of an infection. You can go to sauna on the following day from stitch removal.

3. When can I have sex after my C-section?

Even though your baby did not enter the world via the birth canal, the key here is giving your cervix enough time to close. This typically takes 6 weeks, but some women feel confident being intimate sooner. If you experience burning or other pain, consult your doctor as it may indicate you're not healing as you should.

4. How long does it take for my belly to begin to flatten?

Your body has expanded and molded itself to accommodate a baby for a 9-month period. There is no hurry to seek pre-baby body immediately after birth. Give yourself time to heal properly, listen to the indications of your body, and respect the great achievement you have just reached.

It does take about six weeks for the uterus to return to pre-pregnancy size. Since a C-section entails an incision in the uterus (where your clothing and intimates rest) your belly may be swollen a little longer than after a vaginal delivery. The abdominal muscles are slow to heal. If you gained a significant pregnancy pounds, part of that fat is hiding underneath the skin of your tummy and inside the abdominal cavities. You can start ab exercising once you have healed from the birth experience.

After birth, a womb weighs about a kilogram. In a week, it is halved. In six weeks, your womb has returned to its' pre-pregnancy size. If you choose breastfeeding, your womb will shrink some more, and will end up weighing around 60-100 grams.

5. Do you bleed vaginally after a C-section?

Yes. You can expect to experience some vaginal bleeding for up to two weeks after delivery. The bleeding is a result from where the placenta was attached to the womb. Bleeding may be heavy for the first few days and darker in color. As time progresses, bleeding will be less and the color should lighten.

6. Is Diastasis Recti a common occurrence after a C-section?

Some factors may increase your risk of experiencing diastasis recti:

- Overweight
- Large baby
- Multiples
- Mother's higher age > 34 years
- High amount of amniotic fluid
- Tissue type
- Previous births
- Caesarean section

Diastasis recti, the separation of your rectus abdominis or abdominal muscles, is a common side effect of pregnancy. Normally, most of the damage heals within two months of birth. However, in extreme cases the separation will not heal independently and will require professional rehabilitation. A physiotherapist specialized in post-pregnancy recovery and diastasis recti will be a great help in preventing the worst and during recovery, no matter how much separation your abdominal muscles faced during your pregnancy. Rehabilitation with a professional will still be helpful if your birth was years ago – if problems are persistent, seek help!

If your posture is poor, abdominal muscles are hiding somewhere, tummy is swollen, back aches persistently, and incontinence bothers you, the problem most likely is in your abdominal muscles and their separation. Listen to your body and be prepared to start active recovery 3 to 4 weeks post birth once the incision wound has completely healed.

