



Reducing your risk of wound infection after a caesarean birth

Information for women, birthing people and their families

This leaflet provides information and advice, for you after your caesarean birth. It will help you to understand how to care for your wound and have a smooth recovery. It is important to understand how to care for your wound to prevent infection. Wound infections are also called surgical site infections (SSIs).

By following these essential tips, you can reduce your risk of a wound infection. Up to 16 in 100 (16%*) of all caesarean births will develop a wound infection. Preventing infection will:

- speed up your recovery
- allow you to bond with your baby; and
- reduce stress during this precious time.

What is a wound infection?

A wound infection is an infection that occurs following surgery. For a caesarean birth the infection would be at the incision site (where it was cut) on your tummy or your uterus (womb).

How can I prevent a wound infection?

Hand hygiene

Always wash your hands with soap and water. You should do so before and after touching your incision. You should wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 40 seconds. This is the equivalent to singing happy birthday 2 to 3 times. Rinse and dry your hands with a clean towel / kitchen roll. This is crucial for preventing infection.

Wound care

Your wound dressing will be removed in the hospital before you go home. It will be removed 6 to 24 hours after your caesarean. Some dressings may need to stay on for longer. Your midwife will discuss this with you if this is the case. Do not cover your wound with any other dressing once it has been removed.

Keeping your caesarean wound clean and dry will allow it to heal and avoid infections. Try not to touch the wound itself. You should try to get air to your wound as much as possible. Wear loose, breathable clothing including cotton underwear. Tight clothing can irritate the incision site and trap moisture, this can promote infection. Choose loose, comfortable clothing to allow the wound to breathe. Some women and birthing people like to wear large knickers that sit above their wound.

If you birthed your baby at another hospital, please follow their discharge information. Let your community midwife know if your wound is still covered. Please keep your dressing clean and dry if you have one.

Recognising the signs of infection

It is important to know how to recognise the signs of infection. These are listed below:

- redness around your caesarean wound
- swelling or hardening around your wound
- the area around your wound feeling warmer or hot
- foul-smelling or pus-like discharge
- increased pain or tenderness
- feeling unwell
- fever over 38°C, feeling hot; or
- chills and sweats.

Do not wait if you have any symptoms of infection, or feel unwell. Quick identification and early treatment is of high importance. This will reduce your risk of developing sepsis. Sepsis is when the body's immune system has an extreme response to an infection. Sepsis can be life threatening. Contact Maternity Triage if you notice any of these symptoms. Their number is at the bottom of this leaflet.

What type of stitches did I have?

Most women and birthing people will have dissolvable stitches. These will slowly dissolve over the coming weeks. They do not need any additional care, other than what is advised in this leaflet. You may be able to see the stitches. This is normal, due to different techniques, and depending on your individual circumstances.

You will be told if you have non-dissolvable stitches or clips / staples. Your midwife will remove these for you on day 5. If your baby is in the Neonatal Unit you will be seen in Maternity Daycare to have them removed.

If you notice any gaping or separation of your wound speak with your midwife or doctor. Alternatively, you should call Maternity Triage. Their number is at the bottom of this leaflet.

Can I shower and have a bath?

- You can shower with no concerns. A gentle spray of water from the shower will be enough to gently wash your wound.
- Avoid using soaps and lotions in the area of your wound.

- Avoid soaking in the bath tub until your wound has fully healed. This helps keep the wound dry and reduces your risk of infection.
- If you only have a bath, keep the water level shallow (below your wound). This will enable you to wash without soaking your wound.
- After showering, gently pat the incision dry with a clean towel.
- Avoid rubbing the area to prevent irritation. You may find it helps to lie on a bed with your wound exposed, to make sure the area is fully dry. It may be necessary to lift your tummy a little with your hands to get air to the area.

Medication and follow-up appointments

Take all prescribed medications, such as anticoagulants, as advised. These help to prevent complications following your procedure. Further information leaflets are available here.

- Reducing the risk of venous thromboembolism (VTE) in pregnancy and the postnatal period ([/reducing-the-risk-of-venous-thromboembolism-vte-in-pregnancy-and-the-postnatal-period](#))
- Pain relief after your caesarean birth ([/pain-relief-after-your-caesarean-section](#))

Attend all follow-up appointments with your community midwife. Regular check-ups ensure that your wound is healing properly. They also allow early detection of any issues.

You can contact Maternity Triage 24 hours a day with any concerns. You can call them up to 42 days after your caesarean birth. Their telephone number is at the bottom of this leaflet. It is important not skip these appointments.

Do I need to make any changes to my lifestyle?

You should avoid strenuous activity. It is important to listen to your body and know your own limits. Avoid heavy lifting, intense exercise, and movements that strain your abdomen. You should not visit a swimming pool until your wound is fully healed.

If you are a diabetic (a person with diabetes)

If you are diabetic it is important to maintain normal blood glucose levels. Maintaining blood glucose in the recommended range will promote healing. This will in turn reduce your risk of infection. If you have any concerns regarding your blood glucose levels, call Maternity Triage. Their number is at the bottom of this leaflet.

When should I ask for help?

Contact Maternity Triage immediately if you:

- notice any signs of infection
- have concerns about your wound; or

- feel unwell.

Early treatment of infection can prevent more serious complications like sepsis. It will also make sure that you have a quicker recovery.

Correct wound care and clean hands are essential for a smooth recovery. By following this advice, you can promote healing and reduce your risk of wound infection.

Contact details

Call Maternity Triage on 01227 206737 if you have any worries or concerns.

If you have any signs or symptoms of infection you should see a midwife or a doctor. You may need antibiotics to help your wound heal. If you have already been given antibiotics, you may need your medication reviewed.

You can call Maternity Triage up to 42 days after the birth of your baby. They are open 24 / 7. After 42 days, please see your GP or call 111 if out of hours.

Further information

- NHS: How to wash your hands patient video (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/>)

References

*Health Innovation West of England. (n.d.). Reducing surgical site infection: caesarean birth. Retrieved July 3, 2024. (<https://www.healthinnowest.net/our-work/transforming-services-and-systems/preventing-surgical-site-infections/reducing-surgical-site-infection-caesarean-birth/>)

National Wound Care Strategy Programme Patient Leaflet. Looking after your wound (2020). (<https://www.nationalwoundcarestrategy.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/NWCSP-Looking-after-your-wound-1.pdf>)

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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