

Pain Control After a Cesarean Birth

This chapter explains the types of pain you may have after a Cesarean birth. It includes how long your pain may last, treatment options, and when to call your doctor.

The types of pain that are most common after a Cesarean birth are:

- Uterine cramps (most often while breastfeeding)
- Pain in your incision

Each person feels pain in different ways. Some of the symptoms you may have are listed in this chapter.

We will work with you to make sure you are as comfortable as possible. Our goal is to lessen your pain so that you can move around and help take care of your baby. Being comfortable will also help you bond with your new baby. Remember that walking will help your body heal and lessen your overall pain.



Walking will help with healing and lessen your overall pain.

Pain Medicine

Pain medicine works best if you take it **before** you are in a **lot** of pain. If you had spinal or epidural anesthesia for your Cesarean delivery, you may have received 1 dose of a long-acting pain medicine along with the anesthesia medicine. This usually gives very good pain relief for the first 18 to 24 hours after birth.

You may be given another medicine through your IV if you still feel pain. After this, you will likely take pain pills as needed. Take the pain medicine so you will be comfortable enough to move around and feed and care for your baby.

You will need less pain medicine if you “stay ahead of your pain.” Take your medicine as scheduled, or as soon as you notice a little more discomfort. Your healthcare provider will advise you on how often to take this medicine. It is usually every 3 or 4 hours. Your nurses will talk with you often about your pain and will help make sure your pain is under control.

Incision Pain

Symptoms

These symptoms may last for **1 to 2 weeks** after your surgery:

- Soreness and discomfort along the incision
- A tugging and pulling feeling when you move
- A burning feeling at your incision site
- Numbness above your incision (it can take up to 1 year for feeling to return to this area)

Treatment Options

- Take ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol). You may take these 2 medicines at the same time. Or, take 1 medicine to cover several hours, then take the other kind of medicine to cover the several hours after that:
 - **Ibuprofen:** 400 mg by mouth every 4 hours, 600 mg by mouth every 6 hours, **or** 800 mg by mouth every 8 hours (do not take more than 2,400 mg in 24 hours)
 - **Acetaminophen:** 650 mg by mouth every 4 hours (do not take more than 3,000 mg in 24 hours)

If you take acetaminophen for pain:

- **Make sure that other medicines you are taking do not also contain acetaminophen.** Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions.
- Most women take a prescription pain medicine for about 1 week after surgery. We will give you enough of this pain medicine to last 1 week.
- It is safe to use this medicine while you are breastfeeding. A very small amount will enter your breast milk, but there is no long-term harm to your baby from this medicine.

- Ask your nurse or doctor if your prescription pain medicine contains *opioids* (a kind of drug). If it does, do **not**:
 - Drive
 - Use machinery
 - Drink alcohol
 - Sign any legal papers or other important forms
 - Be fully responsible for the care of another person

Call Your Doctor or Nurse If:

- Your incision suddenly begins to hurt more.
- Your incision is red or is opening.
- You have a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher, or chills (**call right away**).

Uterine Pain

Symptoms

These symptoms may last for **5 to 7 days** after giving birth:

- Tenderness
- Cramping, which may:
 - Be more intense in pregnancies that go past term
 - Increase when you breastfeed the first 1 to 5 days after your Cesarean birth

Treatment Options

- Empty your bladder often.
- Take ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol). You may take these 2 medicines at the same time. Or, take one medicine to cover several hours, then take the other kind of medicine to cover the several hours after that:
 - **Ibuprofen:** 400 mg by mouth every 4 hours, 600 mg by mouth every 6 hours, **or** 800 mg by mouth every 8 hours (do not take more than 2,400 mg in 24 hours)
 - **Acetaminophen:** 650 mg by mouth every 4 hours (do not take more than 3,000 mg in 24 hours)

If you take acetaminophen for pain:

- **Make sure that other medicines you are taking do not also contain acetaminophen.** Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions.

Call Your Doctor or Nurse If:

- Your pain is constant.
- Your pain does not ease even after you take your pain medicines.
- You have a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher, or chills (**call right away**).
- You have a sudden, ongoing increase in vaginal discharge, or the discharge has a bad smell.

Questions?

Your questions are important.

If you have questions about pain after birth, call your healthcare provider during office hours.

If you have an urgent concern about pain after birth, call UWMC Labor & Delivery at 206.598.4616.