

Why Is the Cesarean Rate Higher than Ever, and Rising?

Many factors play a role in the rising cesarean rate. These include:

The comfort level of some caregivers with moving to cesarean section before trying less invasive measures that may avoid a cesarean, for example:

- performing a cesarean due to time pressures in busy hospitals when all is well with mother and baby
- failing to attempt to turn "breech" babies to the head-first position in late pregnancy with hands-on-belly movements

Pressures on caregivers today to practice "defensive medicine", for example:

- given the way our legal system works, caregivers may feel that performing a cesarean reduces their risk of being sued or of losing a lawsuit

Failure to offer women with a previous cesarean birth a choice between VBAC (vaginal birth after cesarean) and repeat cesarean:

- more and more hospitals and caregivers are adopting a 'no-VBAC' policy, and a woman who wishes to have a VBAC may be unable to have one due to these restrictions

Loss of skills or unwillingness to offer vaginal birth to women in some situations, for example:

- a woman with a baby in a breech position may have trouble finding a caregiver who is experienced and willing to attend a vaginal breech birth
- a woman who is expecting twins may have trouble finding a caregiver who is experienced and willing to attend the vaginal birth of twins

Under-use of care that can enhance the natural progress of labor and birth, for example:

- continuous labor support (by a trained or experience companion)
- encouraging women to be upright and moving during labor (not on their backs, a position that can inhibit labor)
- ensuring that women in labor are well-rested and well-nourished

Side effects of widely used medical interventions, for example:

- when caregivers try to cause labor to start (induction), the likelihood of cesarean goes up
- when caregivers use continuous electronic fetal monitoring (EFM), the likelihood of cesarean goes up

The growing perception that a cesarean birth, and especially a planned cesarean, is "safe":

- although cesareans are safer now than before, the surgery still carries a broad range short and longer-term risks for mothers and babies
- although planned cesareans offer some advantages in comparison with unplanned cesareans, this surgery, too, poses a series of risks in comparison with vaginal birth.

Source: Maternity Center Association. *What Every Pregnant Woman Needs to Know About Cesarean Section*. New York: MCA, July 2004.

(Available at: www.childbirthconnection.org/article.asp?ClickedLink=279&ck=10164&area=27)

Note: Maternity Center Association's name changed to Childbirth Connection in January 2006.