

Anaesthesia for Planned Caesarean Section - Information Sheet

The aim of this information sheet is to help you understand the anaesthetic options available to you and what to expect on the day of your planned caesarean section.

What is an anaesthetic and who will give it?

An **anaesthetic** is a technique used to stop you feeling pain and allow surgery to be performed and will be used during your Caesarean section to deliver your baby.

It is given by highly trained doctors specialising in Anaesthesia (anaesthetist) with the support of a trained assistant (ODP) who will be with you in theatre throughout your caesarean section.

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What types of anaesthetic are available?

Either in clinic or on the day, you will be able to discuss the options with the anaesthetist and which is the best one for you. There are two main types:

- **Regional (spinal) anaesthetic** – you are awake but you are numbed from the top of your tummy down to your feet by an injection in your lower back. This is the most common choice.
- **General anaesthetic** – you are asleep. This may be recommended by your anaesthetist.

The option you choose will depend upon your individual situation.

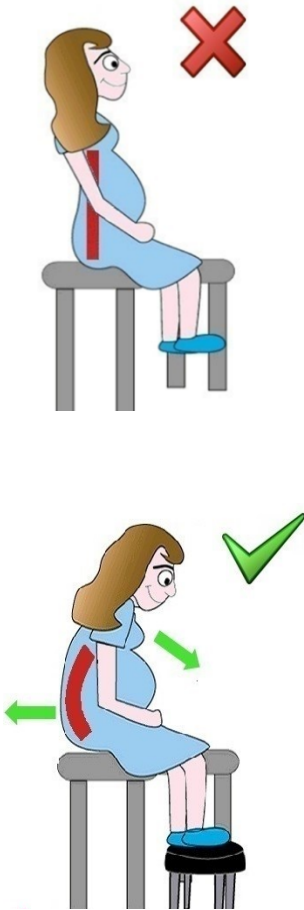
What is a regional anaesthetic?

This is an injection of local anaesthetic (numbing medication) and a strong painkiller into the lower back with a very thin needle and is known as a “**spinal anaesthetic**”. It can occasionally be combined with an epidural (Combined spinal/epidural).

The anaesthetic mixes with the fluid surrounding the nerves that give sensation to your tummy and legs so that you stop feeling pain in this area.

- ☺ It allows you to be awake, comfortable and able to experience the birth with your birth partner.
- ☺ It is safer for you and your baby.
- ☺ You often have better pain relief afterwards compared to a general anaesthetic.
- ☹ Because it blocks the nerves to your tummy and legs – you will not be able to walk for a few hours after and will need a catheter to empty your bladder for a short period (usually 24 hours).

Please speak to a member of staff if you need this sheet in large print, braille, audio or another language



What should I expect?

- Once in theatre, you will be asked to sit up (as seen left) or lie on your side.
- The anaesthetist will insert a cannula into a vein in your arm or your hand through which fluids and medicines can be given.
- Your back will be sprayed with a cold cleaning solution and a sterile drape applied.
- The anaesthetist will feel for the correct location in your lower back and inject local anaesthetic to numb the skin.
- A fine needle is then used to inject the spinal anaesthetic.
- You may feel tingling down one leg when the anaesthetic is given. This is nothing to worry about. Let the anaesthetist know if this happens.
- Your legs/ bottom may start to feel warm and heavy or tingly.
- Giving the anaesthetic usually takes just a few minutes. It can take a little longer if it is difficult to find the right needle position.
- The caesarean section will not start until the anaesthetist has checked the anaesthetic is working (usually with cold spray).
- The anaesthetic usually takes 5 to 10 minutes to work effectively, but may take longer.
- Although pain is removed, you will still feel other sensations like touch and pressure. This can be intense particularly at the time your baby is delivered, although most people do not find this distressing.

Are there any risks or side effects to be aware of?

You will be closely monitored by your anaesthetist throughout the procedure and should there be any unexpected problems, know that the team are trained to deal with them. Like any medical procedure, there are risks and side effects to be aware of and these include;

Problem	How common is it?
Itching	1 in 3 women
Easily treatable drop in blood pressure	1 in 5
Not working well enough	1 in 50
Severe Headache	1 in 100-200
Nerve Damage	Temporary – 1 in 1000 Permanent – 1 in 13,000-24,000
Spinal Abscess	1 in 50,000
Meningitis	1 in 100,000
Spinal Haematoma (blood clot)	1 in 170,000
Paralysis	1 in 250,000

To see an infographic summary of these risks, scan this QR code with your smartphone



What will happen after my Caesarean section?

After the operation you, your baby and your birth partner will be moved to a recovery area and looked after by a recovery nurse. If you have had a regional (spinal) anaesthetic, this will wear off after 5-6 hours. You will be able to take normal painkillers after the procedure and may be offered a painkilling suppository in theatre.