

# The truth about C-sections

## What are the real risks of a Caesarian delivery compared to a vaginal birth?



There is a lot of misunderstanding surrounding Caesarian (C-section) deliveries. To shed some light on the matter, we speak to Dr Tony Tan, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Tony Tan Women and Fetal Clinic and medical director of Alvernia Obstetric Screening Centre.

### When is a C-section recommended?

A C-section is a surgical operation where the baby or babies are delivered via abdominal surgery. When the perceived risks of a C-section are lower than the perceived risks of vaginal delivery, a C-section is recommended.

### Scenarios For A Medically Recommended C-section

- The placenta is lying over the cervix, which carries a very high chance of bleeding during labour
- The foetus is not in a head-down position, which includes the breech or buttock-down positions that can cause obstruction during delivery
- The foetus is in distress during labour, as detected via continuous heart rate monitoring
- The labour progress is much slower than the normal rate
- There has been previous surgery to the uterus, such as a previous C-section, which carries a small risk of rupture of the uterine scar during labour

### Should a C-section ever be "a choice?"

Dr Tan actively discourages elective or medically unnecessary C-sections, as they pose risks to the mother, the baby, and to future pregnancies. He urges mothers to attempt vaginal delivery so long as it is not deemed dangerous for medical reasons.

That said, Dr Tan is empathetic towards nervous first-time mothers. He allays

their fears of prolonged pain during labour by offering the option of epidural analgesia. While others fear the need for an emergency C-section after unsuccessfully attempting a vaginal delivery, in fact, the figures are low.

Some expecting mothers also fear damage to the foetus during labour. However, such complications are rare, says Dr Tan.

### What is the real 'cost' of a C-section for the mother and baby?

Dr Tan explains the increased risks posed by a C-section compared to vaginal delivery.

#### For the mother

- Accreta, or abnormal adhesion of the placenta to the scar, with an associated risk of bleeding and infection during or after delivery
- Difficulties with breastfeeding
- Post-natal depression, often linked to failed attempts at breastfeeding

#### For the baby (especially if delivered before 39 weeks)

- Transient respiratory disorders
- Mid to longer-term respiratory disorders

#### For the next pregnancy

- Uterine rupture
- Stillbirth

When parents are fully informed, few would knowingly choose a C-section. However, if parents remain insistent on a C-section after the pros and cons had been discussed and understood, Dr Tan would respect their wishes.

Ultimately, a C-section should be seen as a medical necessity, not a personal choice. When needed, it can be a life-saver. Otherwise, it can be a source of unnecessary risks.

Above: A C-section should be seen as a medical necessity, not a personal choice.

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