

# Vaginal Birth After Cesarean Delivery



ACOG PATIENT EDUCATION

## Finally . . .

VBAC can be a safe option for many women. Depending on your needs, VBAC may be a good choice for you.

No labor or delivery is risk free. When considering VBAC, you need to know the risks. Weigh those risks against the benefits before you decide. Your doctor will guide your decision to do what's best for you and your baby.

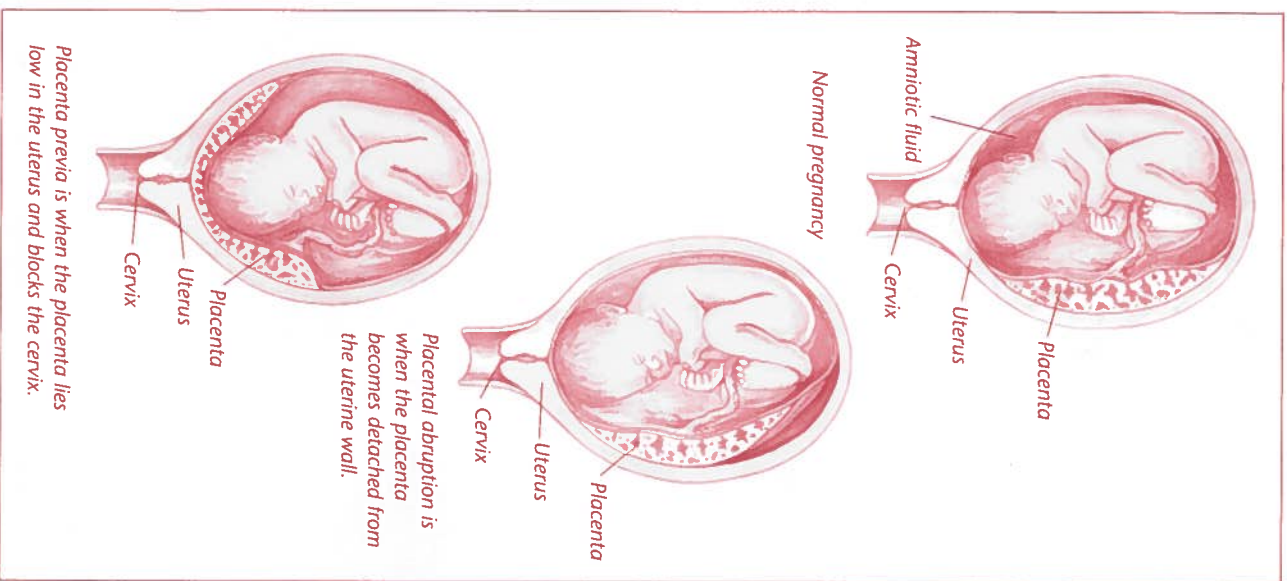
## Glossary

**Abruptio Placenta:** A condition in which the placenta has begun to separate from the inner wall of the uterus before the baby is born.

**Placenta:** Tissue that provides nourishment to and takes away waste from the fetus.

**Placenta Previa:** A condition in which the placenta is low in the uterus, so that the opening of the uterus is partially or completely covered.

**Uterus:** A muscular organ located in the female pelvis that contains and nourishes the developing fetus during pregnancy.



ery may be needed. The facility where you deliver your baby should be equipped to handle an emergency cesarean delivery. There is a higher risk for infection in the mother and baby in women who try VBAC and then give birth by cesarean.

This Patient Education Pamphlet was developed under the direction of the Committee on Patient Education of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Designed as an aid to patients, it sets forth current information and opinions on subjects related to women's health. The information in this pamphlet does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to the institution or type of practice may be appropriate.

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**A** cesarean birth is the delivery of a baby through an incision (cut) made in the mother's abdomen and uterus. It was once thought that if a woman had one cesarean birth, all other children she had should be born the same way. Today, many women who have had a cesarean delivery can safely give birth through the vagina. This is called vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) delivery. VBAC is an option for many women. There are some risks, though.

This pamphlet will help you learn:

- Why you should think about trying VBAC
- Whether VBAC is right for you
- What risks are involved



VBAC can be a safe option for many women.

## Reasons to Try VBAC

Of women who try VBAC, about 60–80% succeed and are able to deliver vaginally. Other women may try VBAC but need to switch to a cesarean birth.

There are some good reasons to try VBAC. Advantages to a vaginal birth include:

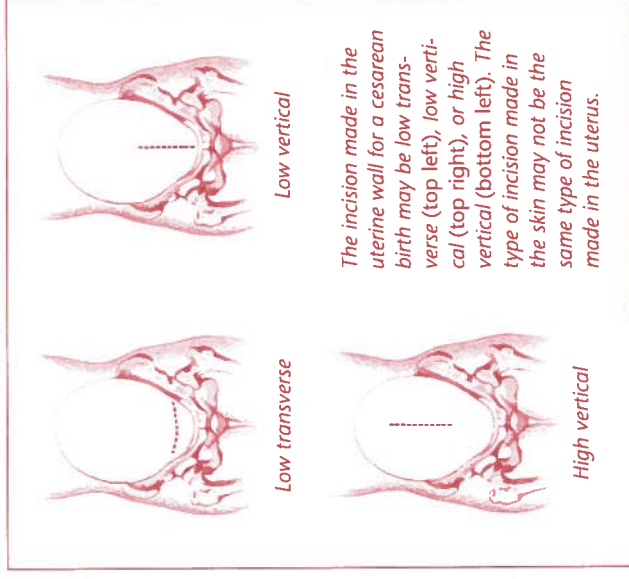
- No abdominal surgery
- Shorter hospital stay
- Lower risk of infection
- Less need for blood transfusions
- Faster recovery

## Is VBAC Right for You?

In deciding if you can try VBAC, a key factor is the type of incision you had in your uterus for your previous cesarean birth. For cesarean birth, one incision is made in your abdomen and another in your uterus. Any incision makes a scar. Certain types of incisions have a higher risk of the scar tearing during the next birth.

You can't tell what type of scar you have in your uterus by looking at the scar on your skin. Your medical records should show which type of incision was used. There are three types of incisions:

- *Low transverse*—A side-to-side cut made across the lower, thinner part of the uterus
- *Low vertical*—An up-and-down cut made in the lower, thinner part of the uterus
- *High vertical (or classical)*—An up-and-down cut made in the upper part of the uterus



Women with high vertical (classical) scars on the uterus have a higher risk of rupture. Women who have had more than one cesarean delivery also may have an increased risk of rupture. Although it does not occur often, a rupture of the uterus may be harmful to you or your baby. If your doctor thinks you are at high risk for rupture of the uterus, VBAC should not be tried.

## Other Factors to Consider

Other factors may affect whether VBAC is an option for you. It may not be a good choice in some cases:

- Small pelvis/large baby—the baby is too large to pass safely through your pelvis during delivery
- Problems for the baby—there are signs that the baby may have problems during labor or vaginal delivery
- Problems with the *placenta*—includes **abruptio placenta** or **placenta previa**
- Certain conditions—includes certain serious medical or obstetric conditions

If problems arise or worsen during labor, or if labor is taking too long to progress, cesarean deliv-