

Supporting Someone Through a C-Section

Whether you're a partner, co-parent, family member or friend, **you don't need medical training to be useful.** Here's what to expect and how to help, from the operating room to recovery at home.



! Your job isn't to control the birth. **It's to listen, help them communicate and take work off their plate.**

IN THE OPERATING ROOM

- **You may wait outside at first**
Support people usually wait while the spinal or epidural is placed.
- **You'll sit by their head**
Expect scrubs, a hat and a mask. Don't touch the blue sterile drapes.
- **Feeling lightheaded? Sit down**
It's more common than you'd think. Sit right away and tell someone.
- **General anesthesia is different**
You usually can't be in the room. Ask about doing skin-to-skin with the baby while you wait.
- **Make sure they're heard**
If they're in pain, feel sick or panicked, or think something is wrong, tell the team.
- **Protect the moments that matter**
Ask before taking photos. If they can't do skin-to-skin, ask whether you can.

Know the plan, expect changes

Know which preferences matter most. If plans change, ask clear questions like "How urgent is this?" and "Which parts of the plan can we still do?"

IN THE HOSPITAL

- **Plan to stay**
Most people stay 2–4 days, and many hospitals let support people stay overnight.
- **Take the night shift**
Handle diaper changes and bring the baby to them for feeds.
- **Be there for rounds**
Take notes and ask questions if you can.

AT HOME

- **Care for them, not just the baby**
Keep water, food and meds within reach. Handle meals, dishes and laundry.
- **Take over the heavy lifting**
Carry the car seat, groceries and anything heavier than the baby, and do the driving until they're cleared.
- **Protect their rest**
Limit visitors and take over newborn care when you can.
- **Be patient about intimacy**
Sex usually waits until they're cleared, often around 6 weeks, and feel ready.

GET CARE RIGHT AWAY

Emergency? Call 911.

- Soaking a pad in an hour or clots bigger than a golf ball
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Incision opening or draining pus
- Headache that won't go away or vision changes
- Trouble breathing, chest pain or racing heart
- Pain, swelling or redness in one leg or arm
- Severe belly pain that doesn't go away
- Fainting or ongoing dizziness
- Thoughts of harming themselves or the baby

Tell staff they were pregnant within the last year. If they say something feels wrong, believe them.

Emotional recovery

Don't tell them how to feel. Listen. For mental health support, call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA, 24/7.

You matter, too. Partners can have postpartum depression and anxiety. Postpartum Support International offers help for dads.

Don't make them manage you

Instead of asking "What do you need?" every time, take ownership of routine tasks. When you do need direction, be specific:

"Would you rather sleep while I hold the baby, or should I make you something to eat first?"

Sources: CDC Hear Her (Providing Support for Pregnant or Postpartum Women; Urgent Maternal Warning Signs); ACOG (Cesarean Birth FAQ); HRSA National Maternal Mental Health Hotline; Postpartum Support International.

This summary is for education only and is not a substitute for medical advice.

Read the full article: birthx.org/blog/supporting-someone-through-a-c-section