

At Prentice Women’s Hospital, our priority is to protect the health of both you and your baby. Although some people progress through labor and delivery naturally by themselves, others may need extra help from their care team.

This brochure will help you understand some of the ways your care team may deliver your baby.



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Ways to Deliver Your Baby



A healthy delivery for you and baby

We want you and your baby to be healthy. During your labor and delivery, your care team will help you decide on a method for your delivery based on what is right for you and your baby.

This information will help you understand possible options for delivery. Talk to your care team about questions you have before you are in labor, so you can make informed decisions together when it is time to deliver.

Spontaneous vaginal delivery

The most common way to give birth is by spontaneous vaginal delivery. This is when you push the baby yourself through your vagina (birth canal). For first-time mothers, the pushing stage often lasts 2 to 3 hours. It may be shorter or longer for some women.

With any type of vaginal delivery, after your baby is born, your placenta will separate from your uterus and be delivered. The placenta is the organ that keeps your baby connected to your uterus when you are pregnant.

Most first-time mothers will have a tear in the opening of their vagina or perineum. The perineum is the area between the opening of the vagina and the anus. If you have a tear, your care team will carefully repair it with stitches, if needed.

If needed, we may make a small cut in the opening of the vagina. This is called an episiotomy. It can help delivery and prevent tearing.

Operative (assisted) vaginal delivery

You may not be able to push your baby out on your own, or the delivery may need to progress more quickly for a safe outcome. If this happens, we may recommend helping you with a special device. This is called an operative, or assisted, vaginal delivery. This is sometimes an option instead of a Cesarean section (C-section) delivery.

There are 2 types of assisted vaginal deliveries.

- **Forceps-assisted vaginal delivery:** The forceps device is a curved, metal tool that looks like long spoons (Figure 1). It is placed in your vagina, on the baby's head, alongside the baby's cheeks. While you push, your obstetrician guides your baby's head out of the birth canal by pulling on the forceps. Most operative vaginal deliveries at Prentice Women's Hospital are done with forceps.



Figure 1. Forceps device

- **Vacuum-assisted vaginal delivery:** During a vacuum-assisted vaginal delivery, a suction cup device (Figure 2) is placed at the top of your baby's head. While you push, your obstetrician guides your baby's head out of the birth canal by pulling on the vacuum. This is less common than using forceps.

Forceps or vacuum-assisted vaginal deliveries are only options for certain patients. It depends on your baby's position in your pelvis. Your obstetrician will talk with you about the safest delivery choice for you and your baby.



Figure 2. Suction cup device

Use of these tools does come with some risks.

While serious injuries from a forceps or vacuum delivery are very rare, some of the risks may include:

- Bruising
- Scrapes or cuts on your baby's head or face
- Pinching of the nerve that travels along your baby's cheeks
- Damage to your baby's bones or blood vessels of the scalp

Possible injuries to you from a forceps delivery include a deeper cut of your pelvic floor, tears in the muscle around your anus or rectum, or damage to your pelvic floor muscles. As a result, you may have:

- Long-term problems with controlling urine, gas or stool
- Sexual dysfunction
- Pelvic organ prolapse

C-section delivery

If vaginal delivery is not possible or safe for you or your baby, your care team may recommend a C-section delivery. A C-section delivery is a type of surgery through your abdomen and uterus to deliver your baby.

Your baby's risks from a C-section delivery may include:

- Breathing problems in the first few hours of life
- Injuries from delivery, such as skin cuts or bruising

Your risks from a C-section delivery may include:

- Infection in your skin or uterus
- More bleeding than would usually occur with a vaginal delivery

- Damage to the organs near your uterus, including the bladder, bowel and ureters
- Complications in future pregnancies, including scarring in your uterus or problems with your placenta

Remember...

Most people who are pregnant have a spontaneous vaginal delivery. Those who have an assisted vaginal delivery or a C-section delivery typically will heal without problems.



Resources

These websites offer more information and answers to frequently asked questions. Enter "assisted vaginal delivery" or "C-section" into the search bar.

- [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists - acog.org/womens-health](https://www.acog.org/womens-health)
- [Northwestern Medicine Health Library - encyclopedia.nm.org](https://www.northwestern.edu/health-library/encyclopedia)