

Using chewing gum after a caesarean birth to support your recovery

Information for patients



This leaflet explains how chewing gum may support recovery after surgery and what to expect if you choose to use it.

Your midwife or doctor can discuss this with you. Whether or not you use chewing gum is entirely your choice.

Why is recovery after a caesarean birth important?

A caesarean birth is a common operation. After surgery, your body needs time to recover.

It is normal for your bowel (gut) to slow down after an operation. This is known as postoperative ileus (POI).

POI can cause:

- **Bloating or abdominal discomfort.**
- **Constipation.**
- **Nausea or vomiting.**
- **Delay in passing wind (flatus).**
- **Slower return to eating normally.**

These symptoms can affect how comfortable you feel and how quickly you recover.

How can chewing gum help?

Chewing gum may help your bowel 'wake up' after surgery. It works by stimulating your digestive system, even though you are not eating. This is sometimes called 'sham feeding'.

Research suggests that chewing gum after a caesarean birth may:

- **Help the bowel start working sooner.**
- **Reduce bloating and discomfort.**
- **Help women and birthing people pass wind earlier.**
- **Support a quicker recovery.**

Chewing gum is a simple, safe and low-cost option that some people choose to use as part of their recovery.

What will happen in hospital?

Following your caesarean birth, your midwife may offer chewing gum as part of your recovery. This would usually be once you are feeling well and your observations are stable. You can choose whether you would like to use chewing gum.

How often should I chew gum?

There is no set requirement. If you choose to use chewing gum, you may wish to chew it for around 30 to 60 minutes at a time. Some women and birthing people find it helpful to use chewing gum until their bowel function returns to normal, but this is entirely optional.

Can I bring my own chewing gum?

Yes, you may wish to bring your preferred gum with you. We recommend using sugar-free gum, individually wrapped. It may also be available from the hospital if you choose to use it.

Are there any risks?

Chewing gum is safe for most women and birthing people. However, it may not be suitable if:

- **You feel very unwell after surgery.**
- **You are experiencing severe nausea or vomiting.**
- **You have difficulty chewing or swallowing.**

Your midwife help to determine whether chewing gum is appropriate for you.

What else can help my recovery?

Chewing gum is only one aspect of recovery after a caesarean birth. Other important measures include:

- **Drinking fluids when you feel able.**
- **Eating when you feel ready.**
- **Mobilising as soon as it is safe.**
- **Following the advice of your maternity team.**

Together, these measures help support recovery following surgery.

Do I have to use chewing gum?

Using chewing gum is entirely optional. If you do decide to use it, you can stop using it at any time. Your care and recovery will always be based on your individual needs and preferences.

Please speak to your midwife if:

- **You feel very bloated or uncomfortable.**
- **You are feeling sick or vomiting.**
- **You have concerns about your recovery.**
- **You have questions about using chewing gum.**

Shared decision making

Your care is based on shared decision-making. This means:

- **You will be provided with information about your options.**
- **You can ask questions at any time.**
- **Your preferences and choices will be respected.**

You have the right to:

- **Make decisions about your care.**
- **Accept or decline interventions.**
- **Be fully involved in planning your recovery.**

Important

This leaflet provides general information and does not replace advice from your midwife, obstetrician, or doctor.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

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