

# Caring for your wound after caesarean section

A guide for patients, birthing partners and relatives

## Other formats

If you need this leaflet in another format such as Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- [rduh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net)

## Introduction

This leaflet provides information on how to care for your wound following a caesarean section operation to deliver your baby.

## What can I expect after my operation?

A caesarean section is a major operation. It may take some time for you to return to your normal daily activities. The outside skin edges of your wound should seal after about two days but the internal healing of muscle and other tissue below the surface goes on for many months.

## After your operation you can expect:

- Pain – even quite small movements such as moving in bed, coughing and laughing can be uncomfortable. Simple painkillers can help but if you don't feel the pain is being controlled, speak to your midwife or GP.
- Vaginal discharge and bleeding.
- A surgical wound – in most cases the wound will be 10-15 cm long, sitting just below and following your bikini line. It may be closed with either a dissolvable stitch or one which will need removing on day five - depending on the choice of your surgeon.

## Am I likely to get a wound infection?

The Health Protection Agency advises that approximately one in 10 women having a caesarean section may develop a wound infection. This is higher than other similar types of surgery and more research is being undertaken to try to understand this better.

However, we know that the following things can increase the risk of wound infection:

- Being overweight
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- A poor diet without enough nutrients.

It may not be possible to change these factors, especially if your operation was not planned. However, by following the advice below, we can aim to reduce the risk of infection and ensure that any problems are spotted quickly.

## What does the hospital do to reduce the risk of infection?

The hospital follows national guidelines on preventing wound infections, including:

- Taking a swab for MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) prior to an elective caesarean section which will inform you and us if you are carrying this infection. You will be offered treatment to clear this.
- Using sterile hair clippers rather than a razor to remove any hair at the operation site. This can be done when you come to the maternity unit.
- Giving antibiotics immediately before the operation.
- Ensuring thorough handwashing during your care.
- Keeping a dressing on your wound for the first 48 hours.
- Providing evidence based wound care advice.

## What can I do myself to prevent complications?

- Shower or bath on the day of your operation.
- It is not necessary to shave your bikini line before surgery. The tiny cuts that occur from using a razor can increase the risk of infection
- Look after your wound as described below.
- Do not allow anyone to touch your wound unless they have washed their hands first. Report any problems with your wound promptly to your midwife or GP.

## How should I look after my wound?

For the first 48 hours your wound will be covered by a waterproof, absorbent dressing. This will be changed by the staff if there is any leakage from the wound. We have specialist dressings and wound care products which may be used if needed. Your midwife will advise if a wound care plan is required.

If the dressing has not already been removed, you should remove the dressing on the fifth day after delivery.

The following are the things you can do to help yourself:

- Always wash your hands before and after touching your wound or dressing.
- Showering is preferable to bathing.
- Do not rub soap, shower gels, or talc directly onto the healing wound.
- Pat the wound dry with a clean towel or a piece of clean kitchen roll kept just for this purpose.
- Wear loose-fitting underwear to prevent rubbing the wound.

## What are the signs of infection?

The following signs could mean that you have an infection. You should report these to your midwife or GP as soon as possible:

- You have more pain in the wound or your womb than you have been experiencing since delivery
- Your wound is red, swollen or hot
- Your wound has green or yellow weeping or discharge
- Your wound appears to be gaping or open
- You have an unpleasant vaginal discharge
- You are feeling feverish or have a high temperature

## What else can I do?

- Do not lift anything heavier than your baby for six weeks
- Do not drive for six weeks
- Rest when possible
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of fluids
- Support your wound during coughing, laughing or sudden movements

## PICO dressing or similar

Your consultant surgeon decides if you are to have a PICO dressing. They will select this dressing if you are at risk of a wound infection due to a higher BMI or because of a long-term condition such as diabetes.

A PICO dressing is a negative pressure device, which has a life of one week and is then discarded.

Using a negative pressure dressing places the two sides of the wound under pressure, decreasing tension, removes any moisture, increases blood flow to the wound site and overall helps to prevent infection.

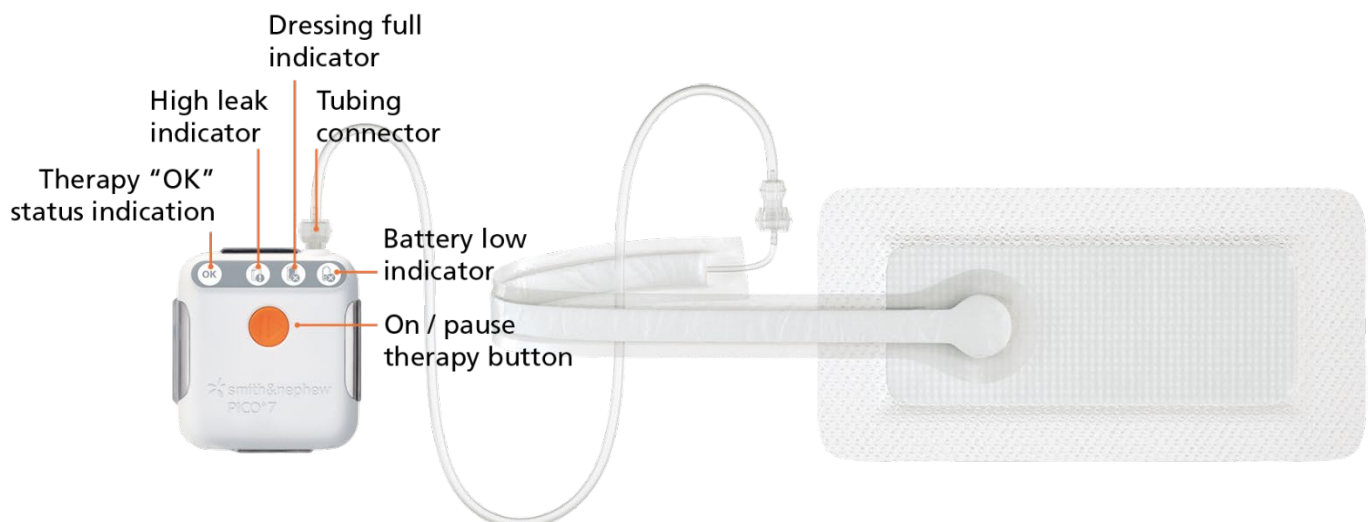
Your midwife will remove PICO on day seven after your delivery.

Please note: **the PICO box contains removable AA batteries; please be aware of this if children are around.**

The PICO box is NOT waterproof, although the dressing itself is. If you have a shower unscrew the box from the dressing and put in a safe place; after showering reconnect and press the orange play button

## Troubleshooting with PICO

You should not have to do anything apart from unscrewing the box when you shower, however it is important that you keep an eye on the box to make sure you are receiving the negative therapy. It will be flashing green on the left-hand side if it is.



### If PICO is flashing due to a leak:

Lay yourself as flat as possible and smooth the edges of the dressing down and press the orange button again. Repeat the process until a seal is obtained and the OK light is flashing green.

### If PICO's full indicator is flashing:

Observe the dressing, if there is a lot of staining on your dressing it will need to be changed; let your midwife know or call us and the dressing will be changed. If there isn't a lot of staining and it is flashing, press the orange button and it should reset.

### If PICO is flashing for the battery:

The batteries are designed to last for one week, PICO should not flash for this reason, unless it is day seven.

If you continue to experience problems with PICO speak to your midwife

### Further support contacts:

- Your community midwife.
- Your GP
- Triage 01392 406616

### Further information

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) (2008) - Preventing and treating surgical site infections. Available at:  
<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG74SSIUNG.pdf.pdf>

Health Protection Agency (2011) Monitoring Wounds for Infections. Available at:  
[http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb\\_C/1203084355902](http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1203084355902)

### Your notes

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## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact PALS:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- [rduh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net)

## Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

You can also share your feedback on the Care Opinion website at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk) or freephone 0800 122 3135.



Scan the QR code to visit the Care Opinion website →

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