

Caesarean section and Breastfeeding

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We know that the rate of caesarean sections continues to rise in UK, accounting for 19.7% of births in 2000 to 26.2% in 2015 (Wise J. 2018).

Codeine (and co-codamol) is no longer recommended for breastfeeding mothers due to the risk of accumulation of morphine in some babies whose mothers have a particular metabolism (www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/codeine). So, what happens after birth for a mum who has had a section?

The standard drugs of paracetamol plus ibuprofen/naproxen/diclofenac are sufficient for some mothers but others (I would have to say most) need something stronger. Whilst in hospital it seems as if oral morphine solution (oramorph) is commonly used with the amount required varying. This is safe in breastfeeding even a newborn because of the way the drug is handled in the mother's body. The preferred alternative opiate table is dihydrocodeine (co-dydramol when administered with paracetamol) which is handled by the body in such a way that drowsiness is much less common.

Opiate drugs tend to cause constipation so a mother who needs these drugs should be given a laxative or stool softener (www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/constipation) The fourth stage of labour – passing that first bowel motion is no fun!

In certain situation mothers may be given low molecular weight heparin injections to avoid the risk of blood clots. These are self- administered and are safe in breastfeeding as the molecules are too large to pass into milk (www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/anticoagulants).

Every mother having a c section will receive an injection of antibiotic in theatre to avoid the risk of infection – these will be safe in breastfeeding (www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/antibioticsf).

Getting around after a caesarean section can be painful so pain relief is necessary. Strong painkillers are usually not needed for more than a few days. They are addictive so it is unlikely that you will be prescribed many but please don't put up with pain, tell someone.

References

Wise J. Alarming global rise in caesarean births, figures show BMJ 2018; 363

To talk to a mum who knows about breastfeeding call the National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.