

VBAC PLANNING CHECKLIST

Here are some tips for increasing your chances of a having VBAC:

- ❑ **Know your options.** Educate yourself and take an active role in your care.
- ❑ **Plan at least 18 months from birth to birth.** 24 months is preferable. Likelihood of a VBAC increases with the length of time between births. Become pregnant at an appropriate weight (BMI) and within a healthy lifestyle.
- ❑ **Pick a primary care-giver (midwife, physician) who supports and encourages VBAC.** Having a care-giver who is confident, knowledgeable and supportive about VBAC is very important. You do not need someone who is going to be nervous about normal labour pain and progress.
- ❑ **Find out everything you can about your last labour.** Understanding why you had a Cesarean will help you determine your chances of a VBAC and make an informed decision. Request your previous charts and review them with your midwife.
- ❑ **Remember every pregnancy and every baby is different.** Even though the situation surrounding your caesarean makes it appear unlikely that a vaginal birth would be successful next time, a VBAC is always worth consideration unless there are absolute contraindications. Many women have been told they would never have a vaginal birth and have gone on to deliver their next and other babies vaginally, much to everyone's surprise!
- ❑ **Be committed and confident.** Name any fears you have and talk about them with your partner, midwife or doula. Exploring your fears until you feel informed about them can take away their power. Don't wait to discover what you're scared of when you are in labour.
- ❑ **Hire a doula.** Doulas can reduce your chance of having a Cesarean birth by 50%. Doulas protect your birth space and your desire for a VBAC. Doulas can help you avoid the interventions (pain medication, induction/augmentation) that make you more likely to have a Cesarean.
- ❑ **Surround yourself with positive, encouraging people.** Do not discuss your plans for a VBAC with people who don't support your plan. Do not let people undermine your confidence. If people are in disagreement with VBAC, ask them to keep their comments to themselves.
- ❑ **Talk with women who have had successful VBACs.** Read as many VBAC stories as you can. Connect with women via the Internet or in your community.
- ❑ **Maximize your chances with a healthy pregnancy.** Eat a healthy and varied diet and talk with your midwife about an appropriate weight gain. This will reduce the risk of complications such as gestational diabetes. It may sound silly but it's true: smaller babies fit better.

- ❑ **Exercise.**
 - Aerobic exercise (walking, swimming, or any other aerobic exercise you are accustomed to doing) increases strength, endurance, and your sense of vitality
 - Stretching & flexibility exercises will help you be mobile in labour
 - Back stretches (cat & dog stretches & knees-to-chest) prevent the baby from going into a posterior position, or do prenatal yoga.
 - Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles of the birth canal
- ❑ **Visualize yourself in labour, pushing, and delivering the baby every day.** Do this when you feel relaxed and safe. Consider hypnobirthing classes. You may want to play special music or wear a particular essential oil. When you are in labour, the sounds or smells will remind you of your visualizations, and your feelings of safety and relaxation.
- ❑ **Avoid interventions where possible.** Your best chance at having a VBAC is if you go into labour on your own, and labour without medications or an epidural. Discuss coping techniques such as breathing techniques, labouring in water and TENS with your midwife and doula. Also discuss strategies for not going too postdates.
- ❑ **Be patient in labour.** Just work with one contraction at a time. Let your body tell you when to push. Wait for the pushing urge to be overwhelming before actively pushing. Ask your midwife to help you find the most effective way of pushing and give it your best effort. Push in different positions and use gravity to your advantage, e.g. on the toilet, standing, squatting, or on your hands and knees and side-lying.
- ❑ **Don't allow yourself to believe that VBAC equals success, and Cesarean equals failure.** If you are as informed as you can be, you will make the right decisions for this particular labour. Unless clearly contraindicated, labour has benefits for you and the baby by stimulating hormones and the baby's immune system. Sometimes however, a Cesarean is the best decision. Remember a Cesarean birth is still a birth, and it is never a failure.