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## Vaginal Birth After Cesarean Delivery: Deciding on a Trial of Labor After Cesarean Delivery

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### What is a vaginal birth after cesarean delivery (VBAC)?

If you have had a previous **cesarean delivery**, you have two choices about how to give birth again:

- You can have a scheduled cesarean delivery
- You can give birth vaginally. This is called a vaginal birth after cesarean delivery (VBAC).

### What is a trial of labor after cesarean delivery (TOLAC)?

A trial of labor after cesarean delivery (TOLAC) is the attempt to have a vaginal birth after cesarean delivery.

### What are the some of the benefits of a TOLAC?

Compared with a planned cesarean delivery, a successful TOLAC is associated with the following benefits:

- No abdominal surgery
- Shorter recovery period
- Lower risk of infection
- Less blood loss

If you want to have more children, VBAC may help you avoid problems linked to multiple cesarean deliveries. These problems include **hysterectomy**, bowel or bladder injury, and certain problems with the **placenta**.

### What are the risks of a TOLAC?

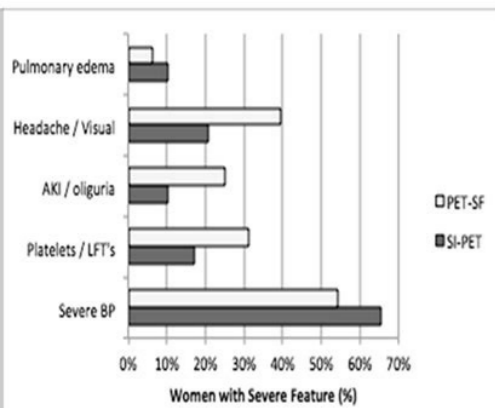
With TOLAC, the risk of most concern is the possible rupture of the cesarean scar on the **uterus** or the uterus itself. Although a rupture of the uterus is rare, it is very serious and may harm both you and your baby. If you are at high risk of rupture of the uterus, TOLAC should not be tried.

### Why is the type of uterine incision used in my previous cesarean delivery important?

Some types of uterine incisions are more likely to cause rupture of the uterus than others. Low transverse (side to side) incisions carry the least chance of rupture. Women who have had one or two previous cesarean deliveries with this type of



Figure. Severe features in women with preeclampsia.



AKI, acute kidney injury; BP, blood pressure; UTIs, liver function tests; PT/ST, preeclampsia with severe features; B/S/PT, preeclampsia superimposed on chronic hypertension

| Variable*                | Univariate analysis<br>OR (95% CI) | P-value | β-coefficient | Weighted<br>scores | Multivariate analysis<br>OR (95% CI) | P-value |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|
| RATD (cm)                | 5.249 (2.252, 12.285)              | <0.001  | —             | —                  | —                                    | —       |
| RALD (cm)                | 4.491 (2.138, 11.418)              | <0.001  | —             | —                  | —                                    | —       |
| RVEDT (cm)               | 10.771 (4.211, 28.979)             | <0.001  | 1.645         | 2†                 | 5.293 (1.348, 20.420)                | 0.016   |
| RVEDV (cm <sup>3</sup> ) | —                                  | 0.982   | —             | —                  | —                                    | —       |
| PAAP (mmHg)              | 23.488 (8.388, 64.940)             | <0.001  | 2.981         | 3†                 | 19.710 (5.032, 77.206)               | <0.001  |
| PAz (cm)                 | 4.889 (2.789, 7.703)               | <0.001  | 1.941         | 2†                 | 4.963 (1.803, 24.895)                | 0.003   |
| RVDSI                    | 14.591 (4.421, 51.981)             | <0.001  | —             | —                  | —                                    | —       |
| TAPSE (cm)               | 0.168 (0.058, 0.488)               | 0.001   | -2.864        | -3†                | 0.097 (0.010, 0.320)                 | 0.001   |

Notes: \*Variables were evaluated one by one according to stepwise selection. †RATD in 1.8 cm or less in PAI 0.2-2.7 cm, weighted score = 2. RVEDT in 10.7 cm or less, weighted score = 2. RVEDV in 100 cm<sup>3</sup> or less, weighted score = 2. PAAP in 23.5 mmHg or less, weighted score = 3. PAz in 4.9 cm or less, weighted score = 2. RVDSI in 14.6 or less, weighted score = 2. TAPSE in 0.17 cm or less, weighted score = 3. ‡Abbreviations: PH, pulmonary hypertension; RATD, right atrial transverse diameter; RALD, right atrial longitudinal diameter; RVEDT, right ventricular end-diastolic diameter; RVEDV, right ventricular end-diastolic volume; PAAP, pulmonary artery pressure; PAz, pulmonary artery diameter; RVDSI, right ventricular septal thickness; TAPSE, tricuspid annular plane systolic excursion.

Anesthesia: Relief of pain by loss of sensation. Anesthesiologist: A doctor who is an expert in pain relief. Breech Presentation: A position in which the feet or buttocks of the fetus appear first during birth. Catheter: A tube used to drain fluid from or give fluid to the body. Cervix: The lower, narrow end of the uterus at the top of the vagina. Combined Spinal-Epidural (CSE) Block: A form of pain relief. Pain medications are injected into the spinal fluid (spinal block) and given through a thin tube into a space at the base of the spine (epidural block). Complications: Diseases or conditions that happen as a result of another disease or condition. An example is pneumonia that occurs as a result of the flu. A complication also can occur as a result of a condition, such as pregnancy. An example of a pregnancy complication is preterm labor. Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT): A condition in which a blood clot forms in veins in the leg or other areas of the body. Epidural Block: A type of pain medication that is given through a tube placed in the space at the base of the spine. Fetal Monitoring: Methods used to evaluate the well-being of the fetus. General Anesthesia: The use of drugs that create a sleep-like state to prevent pain during surgery. Genital Herpes: A sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a virus. Herpes causes painful, highly infectious sores on or around the vulva and penis. Hysterectomy: Surgery to remove the uterus. Intravenous (IV) Line: A tube inserted into a vein and used to deliver medication or fluids. Obstetrician-Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health. Placenta: An organ that provides nutrients to and takes waste away from the fetus. Preterm: Less than 37 weeks of pregnancy. Spinal Block: A type of regional anesthesia or analgesia in which pain medications are injected into the spinal fluid. Transfusion: Injection of blood, plasma, or platelets into the blood. Umbilical Cord: A cord-like structure containing blood vessels. It connects the fetus to the placenta. Urethra: A tube-like structure. Urine flows through this tube when it leaves the body. Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus. Also called the womb. Vagina: A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles. The vagina leads from the uterus to the outside of the body. Timing of an Elective Repeat Cesarean Delivery at Term: Addressing the Controversy: Mohamed K. Ramadan, Ahmad Abdulrahima, Saad Edline Itania, Mohamed Houranib, Fadi G. Mirzac, d, eaDepartment of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine, Makassed General Hospital, Beirut, LebanonDepartment of Pediatrics, Makassed General Hospital, Beirut, LebanonDepartment of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine, American University of Beirut Medical Center, Beirut, LebanonDepartment of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, NY, USAeCorresponding Author: Fadi G. Mirza, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine, American University of Beirut Medical Center, Beirut 11-0236, LebanonManuscript submitted November 15, 2018, accepted January 25, 2019Short title: Timing of ERCD at Term:di and MethodsResultsDiscussionReferencesBackground: Although most professional societies recommend scheduling elective repeat cesarean deliveries (ERCDs) at 39 weeks, some care providers have started to practice scheduling at earlier timing for various reasons. The objective of our study was to compare the outcomes of scheduling ERCDs at 3 different weeks at term.Methods: In a prospective, observational cohort study conducted over a 2-year period, 339 parturients were scheduled for ERCD at 37, 38 or 39 weeks. In an intention-to-treat approach, we are reporting the rates of delivery before schedule, maternal and neonatal morbidity corresponding to each of these three decisions.Results: A total of 5.3% of deliveries scheduled at 37 weeks were performed before schedule, compared to 16.1% and 46.7% of those scheduled at 38 and 39 weeks, respectively (P < 0.0001). Likewise, delivery outside working hours demonstrated a trend that increased with gestation but was only statistically significant between 38 versus 39 weeks. As expected, a significant improvement was identified for neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) admissions and respiratory morbidity between 37 versus 39 weeks but was minimal between 38 versus 39 weeks. There was no difference in maternal outcome parameters among the three categories.Conclusions: Individualizing patients, according to their risk of spontaneous labor, added obstetric complications if progressed in pregnancy and maternal resources should be integrated in the decision of scheduling ERCD. Scheduling at 38 weeks might curb unplanned delivery rate at the expense of a marginal, though non-significant, increase of neonatal respiratory morbidity.Keywords: Scheduling elective repeat cesarean delivery; Unplanned delivery; Weeks of gestationThe American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have jointly issued clinical practice guidelines that strongly recommend deferring elective delivery until 39 completed weeks of gestation [1]. This recommendation has been primarily based on a significant body of evidence demonstrating improved neonatal respiratory outcome at 39 weeks compared to 37 weeks [2-4]. This approach, however, has been shown to increase the risk of macrosomia, meconium-aspiration syndrome and stillbirth [5-6]. In turn, the interplay between maternal outcome and gestational age at the time of delivery has been inconclusive with conflicting data [7-10]. It is noteworthy that a paradigm shift has recently emerged, as a result of several recent studies that suggested less favorable outcomes when a cesarean delivery was performed on an emergent basis before its scheduled time, such as in the event of ruptured membranes or labor prior to 39 weeks [11-15]. In spite of the fact that most societies still recommend deferring scheduling elective repeat cesarean deliveries (ERCDs) at 37, 38 or 39 weeks, unless clinically indicated, some providers are actually practicing earlier timing of delivery such as at 37 or 38 weeks. The objective of our study was to examine, in a contemporary cohort, the rate of performing non-elective (unplanned) cesarean delivery prior to its scheduled time and to investigate whether scheduling ERCDs at 39 weeks yielded the best maternal and neonatal outcomes when compared with 37 and 38 weeks.Materials and MethodsTop A prospective observational cohort study was conducted at Makassed General Hospital, a teaching tertiary care facility that provides services for approximately 1,200 weekend deliveries, as hospital policy prohibits scheduling elective cases on these days. All patients received prophylactic preoperative antibiotics and analgesics postpartum. Patients received thromboprophylaxis according to their risk assessment.Click for large imageFigure 1. Study flow chart. Individual maternal outcome variables included the following: febrile illness was defined as temperature ≥ 38 °C taken orally and in whom no site of infection was identified and where subjects did not receive postpartum misoprostol. An adverse maternal outcome composite included the occurrence of any of the following: development of postpartum febrile illness, endomyometritis, need for blood transfusion, deep vein thrombosis/pulmonary embolism, organ injury, cesarean hysterectomy, postpartum hemorrhage and thinning or dehiscence of the previous cesarean scar. Thinning and dehiscence were subjectively determined by the delivering obstetricians and defined as a disruption of a part or the entire uterine muscle but with intact serosa. Wound infection was defined as superficial or deep infection involving the skin incision site. Endomyometritis was defined as persistent postpartum fever, with or without foul-smelling lochia, with or without abnormal uterine tenderness in the absence of clinical or laboratory findings suggesting other source of infection. The neonatal outcome variables collected were NICU admission rate due to any cause and NICU admission due to respiratory morbidity. Another composite outcome calculated was the development of any maternal or neonatal adverse outcome. Delivery logistics included operative time, need for general anesthesia and delivery on weekends or during night shift.We intended to study a group of independent cases (scheduled at 39 weeks) and controls (scheduled at 37 and 38 weeks) with two controls per case. Prior data indicate that unplanned cesarean rate in experimental subjects was 0.41 (14); thus, we needed to study 67 experimental subjects and 134 controls to be able to reject the null hypothesis (that the unplanned, non-elective cesarean delivery rates for experimental and control subjects are equal) with β = 80 % and α = 5% and an expected relative risk (RR) of 0.5. Power and Sample (PS) calculations software version 3.1.2 was used to calculate sample size. Chi-square test was used to calculate the statistical difference of dichotomous variables whereas ANOVA was used for continuous variables. P value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. A logistic regression model was constructed to determine the most significant factors predicting the rate of the primary outcome (non-elective cesarean sections). Statistical analysis was performed using IBM-SPSS (version 22). The rate of unplanned cesarean deliveries (the primary outcome) increased with advancing gestational age, and the difference was statistically significant between the three gestational age groups (P < 0.0001). Labor accounted for around 80% (n = 63/78) of unplanned cesarean deliveries, while the remaining 20% (n = 15/78) were attributed to the following obstetric conditions: premature rupture of membrane (PROM) (n = 8), fetal growth restriction/distress (n = 4), preeclampsia (n = 1), abruptio placenta (n = 1), and placenta previa (n = 1).Another observation was that 73.4% of ERCD were scheduled before 39 weeks' gestation (11.2% at 37 and 62.2% at 38 weeks) and this was probably influenced by a high rate of high-order cesareans in this cohort. Although this was an observational study where scheduling and management of patients were at the discretion of their caregivers and not according to an internal policy or study protocol, a trend in the scheduling process was observed among obstetricians who tended to schedule most cases of (≥ tertiary cesarean sections) around 37 to 38 weeks, while cases of secondary cesareans were scheduled at 39 weeks, which resulted in higher-order cesarean sections being scheduled at earlier gestational age (Fig. 2). This, in turn, caused more obese patients with higher mean parity and older age to be clustered in the 37 week group, which was statistically significant when compared to 38- and 39-week groups. Other demographic parameters were equally distributed among the three groups (Table 1).Click for large imageFigure 2. Tendency among local obstetricians for scheduling ERCD according to order of cesarean section.Click to viewTable 1. Demographic Features of the Study Population Other delivery-related logistic parameters like delivery at weekend, outside regular working hours or during night shifts have similarly showed the same statistically significant trend that worsened with increasing gestation. Mean gestational age at delivery was also significantly different, as was the mean schedule-to-delivery interval in cases who presented in labor at each week. No difference was noted either in mean operative time or the rate of general anesthesia among groups (Table 2).Click to viewTable 2. Effect of Scheduling on Delivery Logistics None of maternal outcome parameters (maternal morbidity, febrile illness, thinning, dehiscence or thinning/dehiscence) showed statistically significant trend among the three categories. Likewise, the composite (any maternal morbidity/neonatal morbidity) was not different among the three groups. NICU admission due to respiratory morbidity or any cause, however, was statistically different among the groups; being worse at 37 week to ameliorate at 38 week and to show further improvement at 39 week (Table 3).Click to viewTable 3. Maternal and Neonatal Outcomes in Relation to Scheduled Week of Gestation The effect of transition from 37 to 38 and 39 weeks with respect to changes in RR was calculated. NICU admission rate and respiratory morbidity showed significant protective effect between 37 and 38 weeks but not between 38 and 39 weeks. However, delivery at weekend or during night shifts exhibited a negative effect between 38 and 39 weeks but not between 37 and 38 weeks (Table 4). A forward logistic regression model was constructed to study the influence of five variables on the rate of unplanned cesarean delivery and included mean maternal age, mean parity, obesity, age of scheduled delivery, and cesarean section order as predictors of unplanned delivery. The only significant factor that impacted the rate of unplanned cesarean delivery was scheduled time while the remaining variables did not manifest a significant role (Table 5).Click to viewTable 4. Relative



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