

# Why Labor Is Good for Babies

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The stress of labor is a good stress for babies. As the mother labors, her body produces hormones to help her deal with pain. This stimulates her baby's adrenal glands and they begin to produce high levels of catecholamines or stress hormones.

The catecholamines are the same ones that your body produces in the flight or fight response to a life-threatening situation or stressful event. This fetal stress response helps the baby make the transition to their new life outside the uterus.

## Benefits of Labor

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Going through labor provides a number of benefits for babies that having a cesarean birth does not.

If you're in the process of making that important decision, inform yourself about the benefits and consequences first. Here are some health benefits of vaginal birth.

Going through the stress of labor:

- Helps your baby breathe. The hormones produced increases the levels of surfactant secreted, this helps the newborn keep their lungs expanded. As it keeps the lungs open it helps the baby to clear amniotic fluid from his or her lungs.
- Increases blood flow to the baby. Stress hormones help send more blood to the baby's brain, heart, and kidneys.
- Increases energy supply to the baby. This is what keeps the baby satisfied until your breast milk comes in.
- Facilitates bonding. The alertness your newborn has is directly related to these hormones. A more alert baby draws parents in and he or she is more responsive to parents and others.
- Increases immunity. White blood cell count increases the secretion of adrenal hormones.

## Cesarean Birth, Planned vs. Unplanned

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There is a difference for babies if your cesarean is scheduled or unplanned. Even if a cesarean becomes necessary during labor, even early on, the baby has more catecholamines and responds better to extra-uterine life than counterparts born via scheduled cesarean prior to the onset of labor. For this reason, many healthcare professionals will delay

elective cesarean until after the onset of labor when possible.

## The Pros and Cons of a Scheduled Cesarean

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Scheduling your birth might seem more convenient, but is it really worth it? If you're choosing a pre-labor cesarean delivery in the absence of fetal and maternal indications consider the potential risks and benefits outlined by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

It's the ACOG's opinion that, "in the absence of maternal or fetal indications for cesarean delivery, a plan for vaginal delivery is safe and appropriate and should be recommended for patients. In cases in which cesarean delivery on maternal request is planned, delivery should not be performed before a gestational age of 39 weeks."

The risks of a pre-labor cesarean delivery include:

- A longer hospital stay for the mother
- An increased risk of respiratory problems for your baby
- Greater complications in subsequent pregnancies, such as uterine rupture and the need for a hysterectomy

The short-term benefits of a planned cesarean delivery include:

- A decreased risk of hemorrhage and transfusion
- Fewer surgical complications
- A decrease in urinary incontinence during the first year