

Perineal Massage

What is the Perineum?

The Perineum is the soft skin between the vagina and the anus. As this area stretches during birth, it is prone to tearing. Not all tears are the same and some are small and will heal on their own while others may need suturing.

Evidence for Perineal Massage

There is varying conclusions on the research surrounding perineal massage in the weeks leading up to birth. Overall research primarily concluded it appears to primarily protect first time mothers through a reduced need for episiotomy. It did not protect against tears and further research is thought to be needed with regards to women who have previously had a vaginal birth.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1403252/>

https://www.cochrane.org/CD006672/PREG_perineal-techniques-during-second-stage-labour-reducing-perineal-trauma

Note

- It is recommended that antenatal perineal massage be commenced from 35 weeks of pregnancy
- The benefit is seen when practised just once or twice a week
- Performing perineal massage more frequently than this recommendation may decrease the protective effect
- You may experience a strong stretching, or burning sensation when you first start massaging, but this should decrease over time

What should I do prior to performing perineal massage?

- Empty your bladder
- Wash your hands
- Find a relaxing place to perform the massage (bathroom, bedroom, or anywhere else you are comfortable)
- A warm bath or warm compressors on the perineum for 10 minutes prior to the massage may help with relaxation
- Sit/position yourself comfortably
- Use a mirror to become thoroughly familiar with the vaginal opening and the perineum

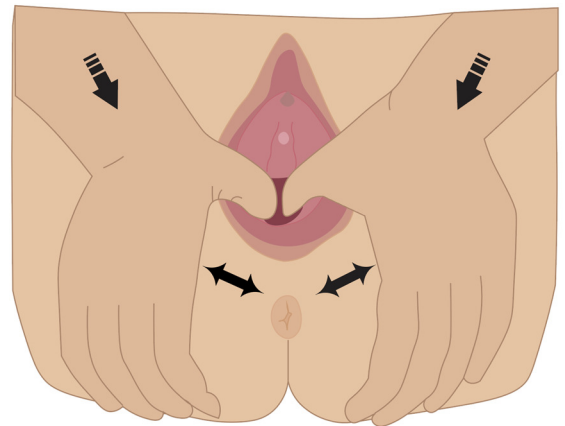
Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises should be practised daily throughout pregnancy. This practice will help you to be able to consciously relax the muscles of the pelvic floor, which is exactly what you will do to assist in the birth of your baby. Pelvic floor exercises after birth will help you to re-tone your stretched muscles and tissues. For further assistance with pelvic floor exercises and other protective measures please contact our women's health physiotherapists.

Technique

- Put a water-soluble lubricant, or natural oil like olive oil, on your thumbs and the perineum
- Place thumbs just inside the vagina to a depth of three to five centimetres
- Gently press downward towards the rectum and to the sides of the vagina at the same time to stretch the opening, until a very slight burning, stinging, or tingling sensation is felt
- Work the lubricant slowly and gently, maintaining the pressure and pulling the perineum forward a little as you sweep your thumbs from side to side of the vagina in a 'U' shaped motion for approximately two minutes
- The massage can be done in one direction at a time i.e. from side to side, or the thumbs can be swept in opposite directions. Try different ways until you find which is more comfortable for you.
- Focus on relaxed breathing whilst trying to consciously relax the pelvic floor muscles and allowing the tissues to stretch. Relax and repeat once.

If your partner is assisting you or performing the massage for you, they need to use clean hands and one or two index fingers inside the lower part of the vagina. It is important to tell your partner how much pressure to apply without causing pain.



Caution:

- Avoid pressure at the top of the vaginal opening
- Massage gently as forceful massage could cause bruising or swelling
- Cease massage with any pain or discomfort

Contraindications - Do not perform perineal massage in the following situations:

- Prior to 34 weeks of pregnancy
- If you are experiencing cervical shortening (sometimes referred to as an incompetent cervix)
- If you have placenta praevia (a low-lying placenta)
- Any other condition where there is bleeding from the vagina during the second half of pregnancy
- If you have experienced pre-term labour that has now settled
- If you have had severe blood pressure problems in pregnancy (including pre-eclampsia)
- Concerns regarding the growth of your baby
- If you are suffering from vaginal herpes or thrush, as massage could spread the infection and worsen the condition