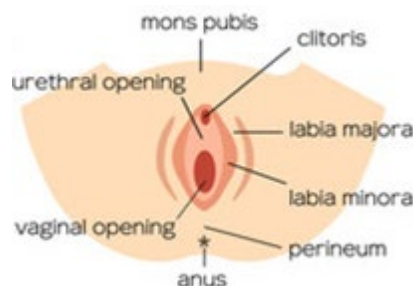


Perineal Massage

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy

What is the perineum?

The perineum is the area of tissue between your vagina and anus. It connects with the muscles of the pelvic floor which support your pelvic organs including your bladder, bowel, and uterus.



What happens at the perineum during birth?

The perineum naturally stretches during birth to allow your baby's head and body to be born. This can sometimes result in perineal tears.



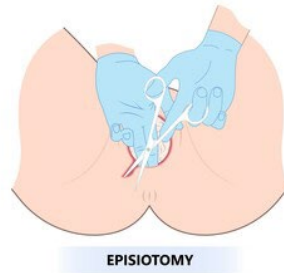
Around 85% of vaginal deliveries result in a tear the skin or muscle of their perineum. It is also normal for your vagina and perineum to be bruised and stretched after giving birth. Most of the tears experienced during birth are either:

- A first degree tear where your perineal skin only is injured.
- A second degree tear where your perineal muscles and skin are injured.

Around 2-6% of women who tear may have more complicated injuries. These may be a:

- A third degree tear. This is where the tear runs from your vaginal wall and perineum to the muscles that control your anus.
- A fourth degree tear. This is where the injury runs further into the lining of your anus or rectum.

At times, when the baby needs to be born quickly or the mother needs assistance, a cut called an episiotomy is made in this area.



Stretching or tearing of the perineum during childbirth can affect the support that your pelvic floor gives you. The pelvic floor offers support to your pelvic organs including your womb, your bladder and bowel to maintain continence and have a role in sexual function during intercourse.

What is perineal massage?

Perineal massage is a way of preparing your perineum to relax and stretch more easily during childbirth and increases the blood flow of the perineum.

Preparing your perineum for birth will familiarise you with the feeling of pressure and stretching of the perineum that you have when your baby's head is being born. This may help you to relax and to feel more confident when your baby is being born.

You can massage yourself or have your partner assist you.

When should I start perineal massage?

Research studies have shown that massaging your perineum from approximately **34 weeks** into your pregnancy reduces the chance of tearing this area during birth. Ideally aim to massage at least 3-4 times a week for at least 5 minutes each time.

What to do:

Preparation:

- The first few times take a mirror and look at your perineum to become familiar with its position.
- Make sure your bladder is empty, and position yourself in a relaxed, comfortable place where you feel safe and will not be interrupted.
- Make sure your hands are clean and fingernails cut short before you start.
- Try using a small amount of unscented organic oil to lubricate the area. For example, olive, sunflower, almond or grape seed oil but ensure you are not allergic to any of the products used. You need enough to allow your fingers to move smoothly over the perineum and lower vagina wall. Use more oil if required to reduce friction.



- It is probably more comfortable to do the massage after a bath or shower as the blood vessels around the area are dilated and the warmth of the water can help to make the perineum feel softer making it more comfortable to touch.
- You may want to start doing the massage yourself to begin with. If you feel comfortable, then you can invite your partner to help you massage as you get nearer to the time of the birth. If you are doing the massage yourself, it is probably easiest to use your thumbs. Otherwise, your partner can use both index fingers. Good communication is important - be sure to tell your partner if you feel they are using too much or too little pressure.
- Comfortable positions include:
 - back propped up with pillows on a bed or sofa with your knees bent out and supported
 - resting back in the bath with one leg on the side then change legs
 - semi sitting squatting against the wall
 - standing with one foot raised or resting on the side of the bath, toilet lid or chair.

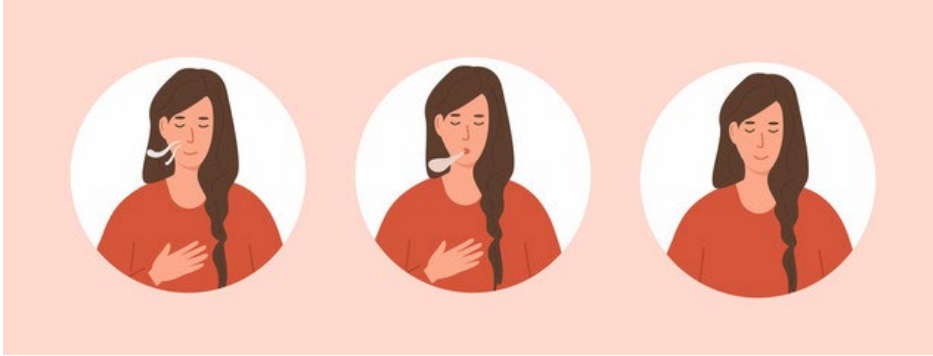
Massage:

- Place one or both thumbs on and about 3 cm within the back wall of your vagina resting one or both forefingers on your buttocks. You can use one hand or two hands depending on preference.



- Press down with your thumbs, a little towards your back passage and gently massage by moving your thumb(s) upwards and outwards then back again slowly in a rhythmic 'U' shaped movement.
- You are aiming to massage the area inside your vagina, but you can also massage the skin of the perineum between the thumbs and forefinger as a separate exercise.
- You may also feel a stretching sensation in the skin on the outside. It should not be painful but can feel like a deep stretch. This is similar to how your perineum will open as you give birth to your baby. With time and practice and as your perineum becomes more elastic, you will increase your ability to relax and can increase the pressure you apply towards your back passage.

- Focus on relaxing your perineum and pelvic floor muscles as much as possible during the massage. This is a good time to practice slow, deep breathing techniques.



Are there any risks of perineal massage?

There are no known risks of perineal massage. However, do not perform perineal massage if you think your waters might have broken or if you are suffering from vaginal infections such as thrush, herpes warts or any other vaginal infections.

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty. If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net. If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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