

Antenatal perineal massage

Physiotherapy Patient Information Leaflet

Patient Information

Introduction

Perineal massage is a way of preparing your perineum to relax and stretch more easily during childbirth. The perineal tissue will need to relax and open to allow your baby to pass through your vagina.

Research studies have shown that perineal massage after approximately 34 weeks into your pregnancy can:

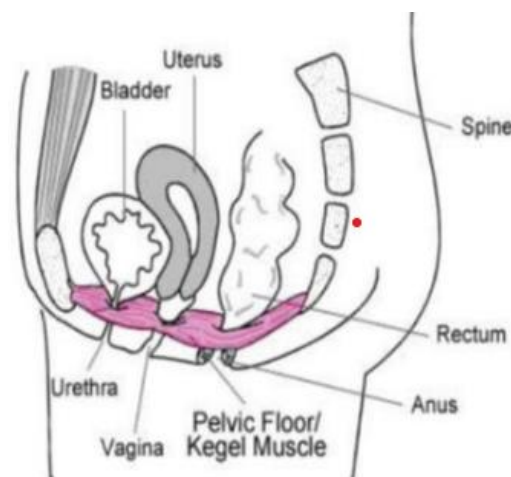
- ✓ Reduce the chance that you might damage this area during childbirth (with a tear)
- ✓ Reduce the likelihood that you may need an episiotomy. This is a cut to the perineum that is sometimes performed to speed up the birth of your baby or to try to prevent a tear.
- ✓ It helps you focus on the feeling of letting your perineum open up
- ✓ It can be particularly helpful if you have previous scar tissue or a rigid perineum, which can occur in some horse riders or dancers
- ✓ Your perineum is less likely to be painful after the birth of your baby

What is the pelvic floor and perineum?

The perineum is the area between your vagina and the anus (opening to your back passage). It connects with the pelvic floor muscles, which support your pelvic organs, such as your bladder, bowels and uterus.

Stretching or tearing of the perineum during childbirth can affect the support that your pelvic floor gives you at the back wall of your vagina.

A weak pelvic floor can affect the control you have over your bladder and bowels and increase your risk of developing pelvic organ prolapse. Damage to your



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perineum might also lead to discomfort during sexual intercourse.

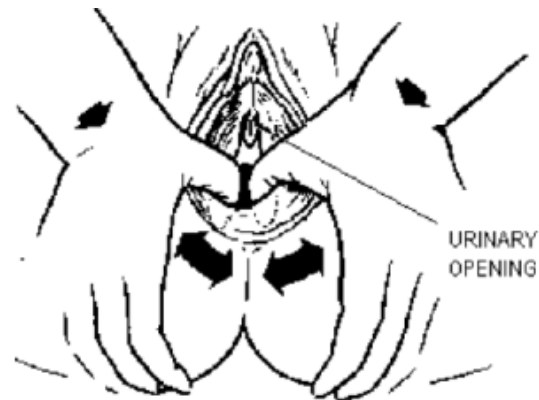
Recent studies show a good reduction in the occurrence of severe tears with perineal massage. Regular pelvic floor exercises also help to reduce the risk.

What to do:

- You can start at any time from 34 weeks of your pregnancy.
- Make sure your hands are clean before you start.
- Try using a small amount of unscented organic oil to lubricate the area e.g., olive, sunflower or grape seed oil.
- You may want to start doing the massages yourself to begin with, then invite your partner to help you massage as you get nearer to the time of the birth. Comfortable positions include:
 - Propped up with pillows on a bed or sofa with your knees bent out and supported.
 - Resting back in a warm bath with one leg up on the side. Then change legs.
- This is a good time to do it because blood vessels in the area are dilated. This makes the perineum softer and more comfortable to touch.
- Sitting on the toilet.

Technique

- Find a comfortable, relaxed place where you feel safe and will not be interrupted.
- Place one or both thumbs on and just within the back wall of your vagina, resting one or both forefingers on your buttocks. You can use one hand if you prefer.
- Pressing down a little towards your back passage and gently massage by moving your thumb(s) upwards and outwards then back again, in a rhythmic 'U' shaped movement.
- You are aiming to massage the area inside your vagina, rather than the skin on the outside. You may also feel a stretching sensation in the skin on the outside.
- It should be comfortable, but you will also feel a stretching feeling. This is similar to how your perineum will open up as you give birth to your baby.
- Focus on relaxing your perineum as much as possible during the massage.



- With time and practice, as your perineum becomes more elastic, you will increase your ability to relax and can increase the pressure you apply towards your back passage.
- Being able to relax through this feeling of increased pressure will help you to relax as you feel the pressure in labour and your baby's head is about to be born.
- Repeat as often as you wish. Aim for 5 minutes every day or every other day.

Do not do perineal massage if you have:

Vaginal herpes, thrush or any other vaginal infection. Please do not perform perineal massage if you have placenta previa. If you feel pain at any point, stop and try again another time. If you continue to feel pain or need further support with perineal massage please talk to your midwife, GP or a pelvic health physiotherapist.

This leaflet has been amended and reproduced with thanks to the Royal United Hospital Pelvic Health Team (Author: Harriet Peatman, Antenatal perineal massage, June 2021, RUH PHY/041)

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If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and whc.pals@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services. If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.