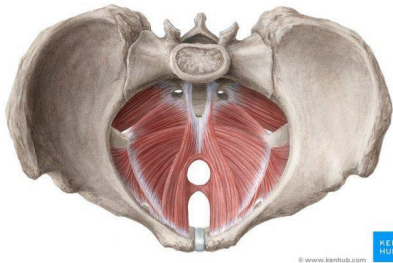
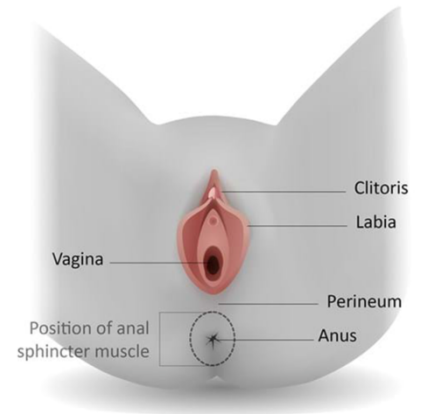


Perineal Massage

Your perineum is the skin and muscle that lies between your vagina and your anus. Your perineum is an amazing structure but far too often, it is neglected.



Your perineum forms part of your pelvic floor, that is vital for maintaining continence, sexual pleasure, and enabling childbirth. It acts like a hammock, holding all your pelvic organs in place. Looking after it now can have a positive impact for the rest of your life both physically and emotionally.



If you have a vaginal birth, the tissues that form your perineum can often tear. If you have an assisted birth, for example with forceps, this tissue may be cut. This is called an episiotomy.

How can I reduce perineal trauma?

There are several things you can do to reduce a tear or the need for episiotomy. Being in good health generally, with healthy nutrition is always a good start. Warm compresses on your perineum in labour, and birthing in an environment where you can move around freely are also beneficial. Kneeling, side lying or a hands & knees position for birth are generally associated with less perineal trauma.

However, **one of the most effective ways to reduce perineal trauma, is by antenatal perineal massage.**

There are multiple research studies showing that massaging your perineum 3-4 times a week, for 3-4 weeks before birth can reduce the chance of any tear happening and reduce the severity of any tissue trauma if it does occur. This means that after baby arrives, you are less likely to need any stitches, will be more comfortable, recover quicker and have higher levels of satisfaction. These factors also contribute to reducing postnatal depression. Combined, this all means you are more likely to breast feed successfully. You are also likely to feel better physically and emotionally. The possibility of incontinence or long-term perineal dysfunction are reduced so your sex life will be better as well.

What are the benefits of perineal massage?

Massaging the perineum antenatally will soften the tissues and allow them to stretch more easily. Any previous scar tissue is softened and stretched so it can stretch again during birth. You become accustomed to a stretching sensation and how to relax and breath through it.

When?

From 35 weeks' gestation. Ideally daily. If you can't manage daily, then at least 4 times a week if possible. However, every little helps.

Who?

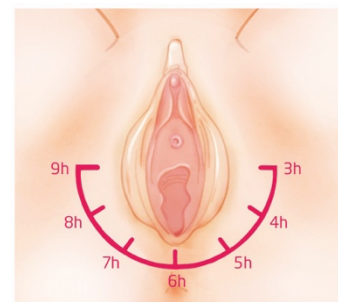
You can massage your perineum yourself or ask a partner to do this for you.

Where?

You need to be warm, comfortable. Relaxed and private. If massaging yourself, you may wish to try this when in the bath or alone on your bed. With a partner, the bedroom or on a sofa propped up with pillows is often easier.

How?

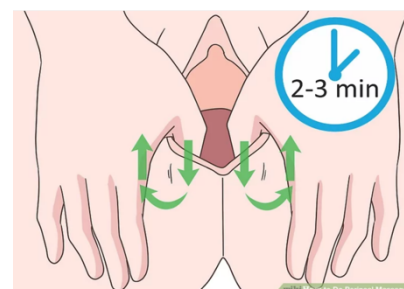
Make sure you have been for a wee, washed your hands (nails are short and no sharp bits), and are relaxed before you start. Ideally you need to be semi reclined, legs apart and knees bent. It's a good idea to use a lubricant. Avoid scented products. Vitamin E oil, Almond oil or olive oil are best. If you imagine this area as a clock, you are aiming to stretch the tissues between 3 and 9 o'clock.



Massaging yourself:

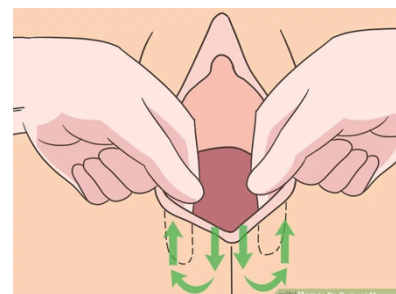
Place your two thumbs about 3-4cms inside your vagina as shown here. Press down and back towards your anus, slowly and continually. You may find the muscles are tense initially but try to do some deep breathing and relaxation and they should start to soften, allowing you to press a little further. You are using your thumbs here to stretch the tissues backwards towards your anus. It may sting slightly as the muscles relax and stretch but it should not be painful. After about a minute, relax for 2-3 mins then repeat.

Next, move your thumbs in a "U" shape, pressing forwards and to the sides. Use your thumbs to massage the inside whilst at the same time, your fingers massage the outside. Stretch the tissues outwards using your thumbs, by pushing towards your fingers. Do this for 2-3mins then relax for a minute, then repeat.



Massage with a partner:

If your partner is helping you, it is normally easier for them to sit between your legs. The technique is the same as described above but for comfort, it is easier for them to put thumbs on the outside and two fingers on the inside.



When should you NOT massage?

If you are sore, have an infection, broken skin, risk of premature birth, massage is painful or you feel emotionally uncomfortable, you should not massage. If in doubt, talk to your midwife.