

What is the perineum?

The perineum is the area located between and vagina and the anus.

This area stretches as the head of your baby is being born. Sometimes particularly with the birth of your first baby the perineum may tear. This is known as a perineal tear.

Perineal massage has been shown to increase elasticity and reduce the risk of tearing. Along with pelvic floor exercises, perineal massage may help protect your perineum and prevent perineal injury and the need for episiotomy.

Contraindications:

Perineal massage should *not* be performed on women:

- prior to 34 weeks of pregnancy (as this is earlier than has been used in trials)
- with cervical shortening
- with placenta praevia or any other condition where there is bleeding from the vagina during the second half of pregnancy
- with severe blood pressure problems in pregnancy
- with an active vaginal infection (herpes, thrush).

Discuss with your doctor or midwife if you are unsure if any of these conditions apply to you.

Preparing the perineum for massage:

- ⇒ Empty your bladder
- ⇒ To help relax the perineum before massage, have a warm bath or shower.
- ⇒ You will need a lubricant such as wheat germ oil, sesame oil, cocoa butter, vitamin E, KY gel or natural vaginal lubrication.
- ⇒ Wash your hands and your partners hands well.
- ⇒ Sit or lean back. It may help to prop your hips comfortably with a pillow
- ⇒ Using a mirror for the first few times will help you to become familiar with the area you are massaging.
- ⇒ You can do the massage yourself but you may find it easier for your partner to do it.

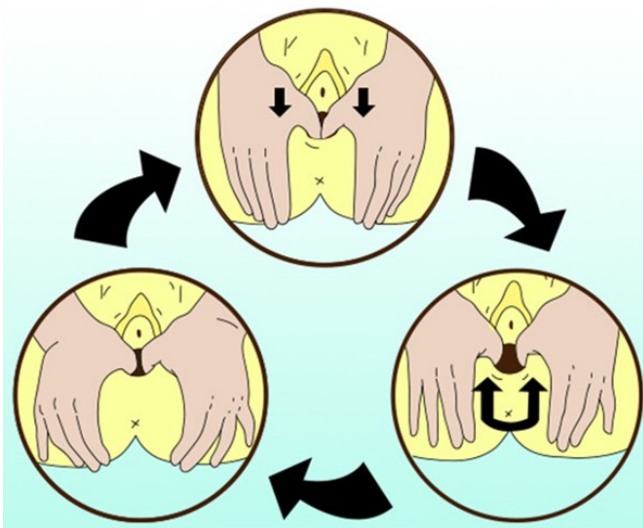
How will perineal massage help during birth:

- ◇ Perineal massage may increase the elasticity and flexibility of the perineum, which will help it stretch as the baby's head pushes down during the birth.
- ◇ May decrease the burning and stinging sensations during the second stage of labour.
- ◇ May reduce the need for an episiotomy which is a cut to the opening of the vagina and perineum.
- ◇ May reduce the risk of ongoing pain in the perineal area at 3 months post-delivery.



How to perform perineal massage

- ⇒ Put lubricant on your thumbs and around the perineum
- ⇒ Place your thumbs 3-4cm inside the vaginal opening, about 3-4 cm in depth.
- ⇒ Apply gentle pressure downward towards the rectum and to the sides of the vagina at the same time, to stretch the opening. A very slight burning, stinging, or tingling sensation will be felt.
- ⇒ Hold the stretch for approximately 45-60 seconds, then repeat 5-10 times.
- ⇒ Focus on relaxed breathing while trying to consciously relax the pelvic floor muscles and allowing the tissues to stretch.



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Starting at week 34 or 35 of pregnancy, a woman (or her partner) can start massaging the perineum 1–2 times per week, with each session lasting for a maximum of 5 minutes.

Women should be advised that massaging more than 1 to 2 times per week does not result in less perineal trauma.

More frequent use of perineal massage is actually associated with *decreased* benefits and is not recommended.

There may be some transient discomfort in the first few weeks of massage.

References:

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2021). Third and Fourth Degree Perineal Tears Clinical Care Standard. Sydney: ACSQHC

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Western Sydney Local Health District – Women's and Newborn Health Westmead Hospital (2016). Fact Sheet Perineal Massage. From <https://www.wslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/1021/Perineal%20Massage%20V2%20.pdf.aspx>

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Perineal Massage in Pregnancy



If you have further questions on perineal care during pregnancy, please discuss with your doctor or midwife.