

Antenatal Perineal Massage

PREPARING YOUR BODY FOR BIRTH

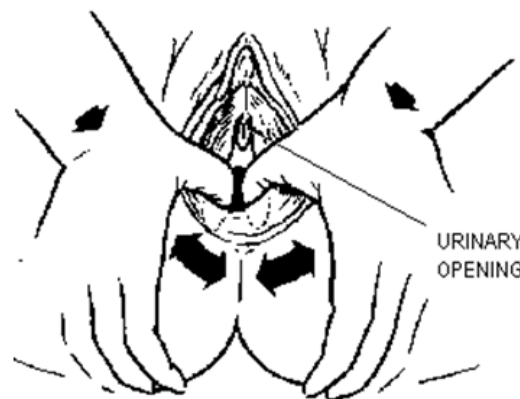
Information for Women — Maternity Services

The information in this information sheet is designed to be used in conjunction with instruction by a Physiotherapist and/or Midwife

Perineal massage is the gentle stretching and massaging of the skin and soft tissues between the anus and vagina (perineum). Perineal massage is a way of preparing your perineum to stretch during the birth of your baby. While it can be performed daily, research has shown that women who massage their perineum 1-2 times a week from 35 weeks of pregnancy are less likely to need an episiotomy (a surgical cut into the perineum). Perineal massage in pregnancy may also reduce a perineal tear occurring during birth that requires stitches. Perineal massage is particularly effective for those having their first baby.

How to perform perineal massage:

1. The massage should be performed at least once or twice a week from 35 weeks gestation onwards, but can be performed as often as daily.
2. Empty bladder, wash hands and find a quiet, relaxing place where you will not be interrupted to perform the massage, e.g. bedroom or bathroom.
3. Sit in a comfortable, supported position. A warm bath or a warm cloth applied to the perineum prior to the massage may help. It may be helpful to use a mirror the first few times to help you identify the vaginal opening and the perineum.
4. Apply a water-based lubricant, such as KY Jelly, or a natural oil, like olive oil, on your thumbs and the perineum before starting the massage.
5. Place one or two thumbs into the vaginal opening, 3-4 cms along the back wall. (see diagram)
6. Press the perineum downwards towards the anus/back passage and sideways until a slight stretching sensation is felt. It should not be painful.
7. Massage in a 'U' shaped movement while maintaining the stretch pressure. It is normal to feel a slight burning or tingling sensation. This may feel uncomfortable to start with but will diminish over time. Focus on relaxing the perineum and allowing the tissues to stretch. Continue massaging for about 5 minutes.
8. If you and your partner feel comfortable about performing perineal massage, then your partner can assist you or perform the massage for you. Your partner needs 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.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Do not perform perineal massage if you have active vaginal herpes, thrush or any other vaginal infection. Always check with your midwife or GP if you are unsure.

The information in this Patient Information Sheet has been reproduced courtesy of the Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital, Queensland, Australia; & Antenatal perineal massage for reducing perineal trauma, Cochrane Review, 2013