

Antenatal Perineal Massage

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

What is a perineal massage?

Perineal massage is a technique aimed to gently stretch the perineum (the area between the vaginal opening and the anus). Research has shown that massaging your perineum from 35 weeks of pregnancy onwards may reduce the risk of this area tearing during childbirth.

How do I prepare for massage of the perineum?

It is important that you are relaxed when carrying out perineal massage. In order to soften the tissues, starting the massage after a bath or a shower may be helpful. It may help to use a mirror. Wash your hands and make sure your nails are short to prevent scratching delicate vaginal tissues.

What oil should I use?

Use a natural lubricant such as vitamin E oil or sweet almond oil. Do not use scented or synthetic oils for example petroleum jelly. If you are sensitive to any of these, you can use a water soluble lubricant gel instead.

How do I perform the message?

It is important to be relaxed during the massage. Find the best comfortable position for you. You can sit upright in bed in a semi-sitting position with bent knees and pillows to support your back. Support each knee with a pillow to allow your inner thigh muscles to relax.

Put your thumbs 2.5cm to 4cm (1 inch to 1.5 inches) inside your vagina.
Rest your forefingers on your buttocks

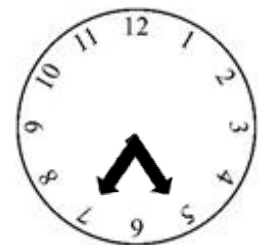
Press downward towards your anus (back passage) and to the sides at the same time until you feel a slight burning, stinging, or tingling sensation.

Imagine your pelvic floor is a clock face, your pubic bone is 12 o'clock, and your back passage is 6 o'clock.

You should place your thumbs at 7 o'clock and 5 o'clock and massage gently down and out in a "U" shape for 5 minutes.

Breathe deeply and slowly and try to consciously relax your pelvic floor muscles.

If your partner is doing the perineal massage, follow the same basic instructions as above. Good communication is important. Be sure to tell your partner if you have too much pain or burning. Wash your hands afterwards.



How often should I do perineal massage?

There is no agreement in the research as to how often to perform perineal massage. Once there is no soreness or tenderness following the massage you could perform this daily, however if you are tender or sore for the remainder of the day and/or the next day then 3 times a week would be recommended and to perform the massage more gently. Aim to do this for 5 minutes from every day to three times per week.

What are the benefits of perineal massage?

Perineal massage:

- May reduce the severity of tears and your risk of 3rd and 4th degree perineal tears during labour.
- May make you less likely to need an episiotomy (cut to the birth canal during the birth of your baby).
- Reduce your risk of perineal pain after your baby is born.
- Familiarise you with the stretching sensation of birth, which may help you relax these muscles birthing your baby.

Do not do perineal massage if:

- If you have an infection such as vaginal thrush, herpes or any other active vaginal infection.
- If your waters have broken.
- If you have had a procedure called a 'cervical cerclage' during your pregnancy.
- Prior to 34 weeks of pregnancy (as this is earlier than has been used in trials).
- You have placenta praevia or any other condition where there is bleeding from the vagina during the second half of pregnancy.
- You have severe blood pressure problems in pregnancy (including pre-eclampsia).
- There are concerns regarding the growth of your baby.
- Your doctor has advised you not to.

Should you have any queries please contact the physiotherapy department on 0214920567. If you have any concerns or queries related to your suitability for perineal massage please discuss with your doctor.

References:

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- Chen, Q. et al. (2022) "Effect of prenatal perineal massage on postpartum perineal injury and postpartum complications: A meta-analysis," *Computational and Mathematical Methods in Medicine*, 2022, pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3315638>.
- Hajela, N. et al. (2021) "Effectiveness of prenatal perineal massage in reducing the risk of perineal trauma during vaginal delivery in nulliparous women: A meta-analysis and Evidence Based Review," *Journal of Women's Health and Development*, 04(04). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26502/fjwhd.2644-28840068>.
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- Queensland Clinical Guidelines, Queensland Clinical Guidelines Steering Committee State-wide Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Network (Queensland), (June 2018). A, MN18.30-V4-R23 (Accessed March 2023). Available at: https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/142384/g-pericare.pdf (Accessed: February 8, 2023)