

Perineal Massage During Pregnancy

Perineal massage is a way for you to prepare your perineal tissues for the birthing process. Prenatal perineal massage has been shown to be beneficial in reducing the risk of perineal tearing or need for an episiotomy during birth in first time mothers.

Perineal massage is a technique that slowly and gently stretches the skin, muscles, and tissues between the vagina and rectum. This preparation is similar to a runner who gradually stretches his calf muscles before a race to prevent muscle tearing injuries.

During birth, your baby's head will descend on the perineum. This pressure will stretch the tissues and muscles. The stretching creates the tingling burning sensations you may feel as the baby's head is crowning. Perineal massage can help prepare your tissues for this process.

Before you start:

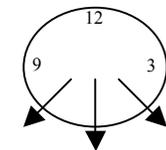
- Σ You can do perineal massage yourself or with the assistance of a partner.
- Σ You may start at around 34-35 weeks of pregnancy if you are not having any difficulties with preterm labor.
- Σ Do NOT do perineal massage if you have a vaginal infection or active herpes lesions.
- Σ Avoid the urinary opening (urethra) to prevent urinary tract infections.

Getting Ready:

- Σ You may want to use a mirror to visualize the vagina and the perineum the first few times.
- Σ Consider taking a warm bath or using warm compresses on your perineum for 5-10 minutes.
- Σ If you have scar tissue from a previous birth, spend extra time on that area. Scar tissue is not as stretchy as the rest of your skin.
- Σ After birth, you can tone up the stretched muscles in the vagina by utilizing Kegels (pelvic muscle exercises).

Directions:

1. Empty your bladder before you begin.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Find a comfortable private place. Using pillows, sit and lean back into a semi-sitting position with your legs spread apart. If you use a mirror the first few times, a freestanding mirror works best.
4. Put lubricant or massage oil on your thumbs or fingers and around the perineum. You may use a lubricant such as KY jelly, cocoa butter, vitamin E Oil, pure vegetable oil or olive oil. (Do NOT use petroleum based oil).
5. Place your thumbs (or partner may use two fingers) about 1-1 1/2 inches inside your vagina. Press downwards gently and firmly until you feel a slight burning, tingling or stinging sensation- don't add anymore pressure-hold the pressure for 1-2 minutes. The tingling may subside or the area may feel a little numb.
6. Repeat this directing the pressure to the sides at the 4 o'clock and then the 8 o'clock positions.
7. Next, slowly and gently massage back and forth over the lower half of your vagina, working the lubricant into the tissues. Do this for 3-4 minutes. Do NOT massage the upper portion where the urinary opening is located.
8. As you massage, pull gently outwards (forward) on the lower part of the vagina with your thumbs hooked inside. This stretches the tissues, as your baby's head will do during birth.



Remember:

- * Do this massage once a day beginning at 34-35 weeks. You should notice and increase in flexibility and stretchiness in about a week.
- * Don't be too vigorous.
- * If a partner is helping, communication is important. If you are the partner, be sensitive to what she wants you to do. She will tell you how much pressure to apply. Massage firmly but gently. Being too vigorous could cause bruising or swelling in these sensitive tissues.