

Antenatal Perineal Massage

Information for women

Introduction

Perineal massage is a way of preparing your perineum to stretch more easily during childbirth. Research has shown that massaging your perineum from approximately 34 weeks into your pregnancy reduces the chance of damaging this area during birth (with a tear or bruising). This is particularly beneficial if you are having your first baby.

This leaflet provides information about how to massage your perineum.

What is the perineum and pelvic floor?

The perineum is the area of tissue between your vagina and anus (opening to your back passage). It connects with the muscles of the pelvic floor. Stretching or tearing of the perineum during childbirth can affect the support that your pelvic floor gives you at the back wall of your vagina. This can mean that you are more likely to have a prolapse (or dropping down) of your uterus (womb). A weak pelvic floor can also affect the control you have over your bladder and bowels. Damage to your perineum might also lead to discomfort and pain during sexual intercourse.

Advantages of antenatal perineal massage

- It increases the elasticity (stretchiness) and the blood flow of the perineum. This means that it will stretch more easily and less painfully during birth.
- Tears in the perineum are less likely and you are less likely to need an episiotomy (a cut to the perineum).

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- Your perineum is less likely to be painful after the birth of your baby.
 - Preparing your perineum for birth will familiarise you with the feeling of pressure and stretching of the perineum that you will have when your baby's head is being born. This may help you relax and to feel confident when your baby is being born.

When should I start and how do I do it?

You can start any time from 34 weeks of your pregnancy. The massage can be done by yourself or by your partner if you are comfortable with this. After a bath or shower the perineum will be more comfortable to touch because blood vessels in the area will be dilated. You will also be more relaxed.

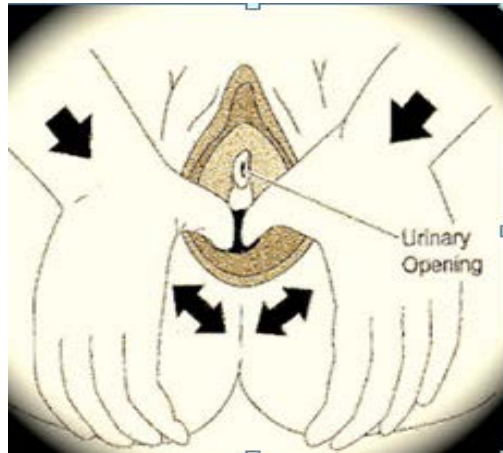
We suggest using a small amount of unscented organic oil, such as olive, grapeseed or coconut oil. Do not use synthetic oils such as baby oil or petroleum jelly (Vaseline). Make sure your hands are clean before starting.

Comfortable positions include:

- Propped up with pillows on a bed or sofa with your knees bent out and supported.
- Resting back in the bath with one leg on the side. Then change legs.
- Standing under a warm shower with one leg on a stool. Then change legs.
- Sitting on the toilet.

Techniques

- Get comfortable and relaxed in a place where you feel safe and will not be interrupted.
 - You might find it easier to use a mirror for the first few tries, to help you see what you are doing.
 - Place one or both thumbs on and just within the back wall of your vagina, resting one or both forefingers on your buttocks. You may prefer to use only one hand.
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- Press down a little towards your back passage, then gently massage by moving your thumb and forefinger together upwards and outwards and then back again in a rhythmic 'U' shaped movement. You are aiming to massage the area inside your vagina, rather than the skin on the outside. However you may still feel the stretching sensation on the skin.
- Focus on relaxing your perineum as much as possible during the massage.
- Aim for around five minutes at a time, on alternate days.
- Perineal massage should be comfortable, but you will also feel a stretching feeling. This is similar to how your perineum will open up as you give birth to your baby.
- With time and practice, your perineum will become more elastic and you will increase your ability to relax so you can increase the pressure towards your back passage.

Do not do perineal massage if you have:

Thrush or any other vaginal infection. If you have vaginal herpes, seek advice from your midwife or GP if it is sore. If you feel any pain at any point, stop and try again another time. If you continue to find this painful speak with your midwife and they will help you to check your technique.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call us:

Tunbridge Wells Hospital (Pembury)

Maternity Day Assessment

 01892 633041


Maidstone Hospital

Maternity Day Assessment

 01622 227121

Further information and advice can be obtained from:

NHS 111



 111

NHS Choices online

www.nhs.uk

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

Telephone:  01622 224960 or  01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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