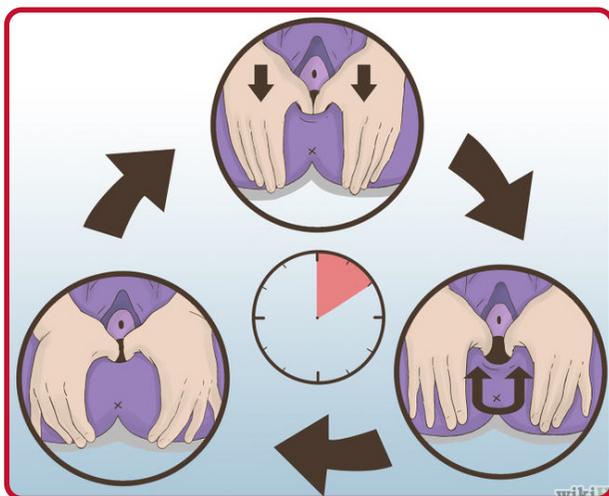


PERINEAL MASSAGE IN PREGNANCY



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What is the “Perineum”?

The perineum is the area between the vaginal opening and the anus (motion passage opening). This area stretches a lot during childbirth and sometimes it tears.

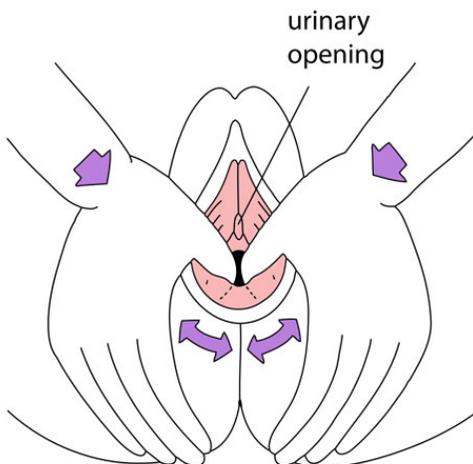
I am concerned about Perineal Tears – How often do they occur ?

Approximately 40% to 85% of all women who give birth vaginally can sustain tears. About two-thirds of these women will need stitches. The perineal tissues of many women lack flexibility and are not able to stretch during delivery, which results in perineal trauma or tearing.

Can I do anything before the birth to help me avoid a tear ?

Reducing tearing has been the subject of many research studies which have found that perineal massage during the last weeks of pregnancy can reduce tearing at birth. Perineal massage during the last several weeks of pregnancy can relax and stretch the tissues of the perineum. This gentle massage keeps the perineal tissues flexible and supple, and prepares them to relax and expand naturally during delivery.

How is a Perineal Massage done ?



Perineal massage involves gently kneading the perineum. The practice is most often undertaken during the final weeks of pregnancy (from around 35 weeks) in order to alleviate tears to the perineum during childbirth. Sometimes regular perineal massage can eliminate need for an episiotomy.

STEPS

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- Cut your fingernails short. (It will prevent tearing of tissues in the vagina.)
- Prop yourself up in bed. Use pillows if necessary to support your back.
- Use a lubricant – the best lubricants are vitamin E oil, almond or olive oil.
- Place your thumbs about 1" (3 cm) inside your vagina. Rest your fingers on your buttocks.
- Press down (towards the anus) and to the side of the vaginal wall. Hold your thumbs in this position until you begin to feel a slight burning or stretching sensation
- Slowly and gently massage the lower half of your vagina. Use a 'U' shaped movement.
- Continue to massage for 10 minutes. Do this twice daily.
- The goal is to stretch and massage the back portion of the birth canal, down towards the anus and then apart side to side, using more and more pressure over time. Keep massaging down and out to stretch and relax these tissues.
- Pressure should not be painful, but during the first couple of weeks, it is normal to feel a slight burning or stretching sensation. Practicing awareness and breathing when you feel this pressure, will help you feel more in control when you feel these same sensations during delivery!

Does Perineal Massage in pregnancy help all women ?

Massage seems to work better for some women than others. Women having their first baby, women 30 years or older, and women who have had episiotomies before, have fewer tears and less severe tears when perineal massage is done from 35 weeks of pregnancy. (Episiotomy is a planned cut in the perineum to facilitate delivery in selected cases.)

Can my partner help ?

Yes! Many women find that it is easier to have their partners do this massage.

Are there any risks from Perineal Massage during pregnancy ?

Not that we know of. It is free. It does not hurt. It is easy to do. However you should check with your health care provider before beginning perineal massage.

BENEFITS

- Being able to participate and enjoy a more comfortable birthing with less risk of tears and quicker postnatal recovery.
- Antenatal perineal massage appears to have some benefits in reducing second or third degree tears or episiotomies, and in instrumental deliveries. This effect was strong in the age group 30 years and above.

NOTE

Do not perform perineal massage if you have herpes or other infections as it can cause flaring up of the infection.

If you believe your bag of water is leaking, check with your health care provider before putting anything in your vagina.

REFERENCES

1. www.childbirth.org/articles/massage.html
2. www.babycentre.co.uk