

Your important health information

Perineal massage

What is perineal massage and why should I perform it?

- Perineal massage involves massaging the perineum, the area between the vagina and anus. It can help you prepare the muscles and skin for the sensations of vaginal birth.
- Perineal massage is most effective from 34 weeks, when performed one to two times a week in 5 to 10-minute sessions.
- Research shows that perineal massage can reduce the risk of perineal tearing for women who have not previously had a vaginal birth and postnatal perineal pain for all women.

Types of perineal trauma

Following vaginal birth approximately 85% of women will experience some degree of perineal trauma. Perineal trauma is classified according to the degree of injury.

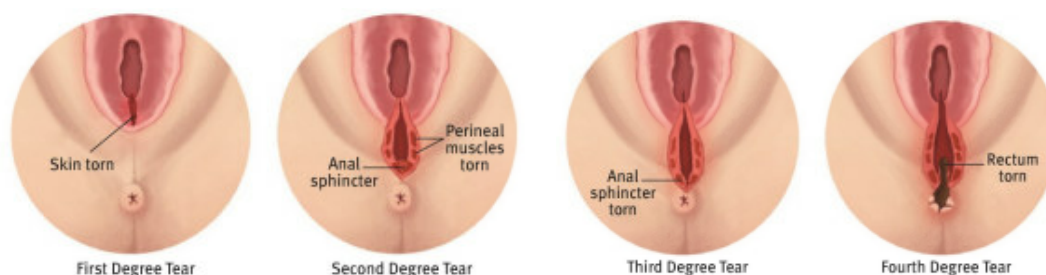
First Degree: Injury to perineal skin.

Second Degree: Injury to perineal muscle.

Third Degree: Injury to perineum involving the anal sphincter muscle.

Fourth Degree: Injury to perineum involving the anal sphincter and into anal canal.

Episiotomy: Surgical cut to the perineal skin and muscle performed at the time of birth to enlarge the vaginal outlet.



What do I need to perform perineal massage?

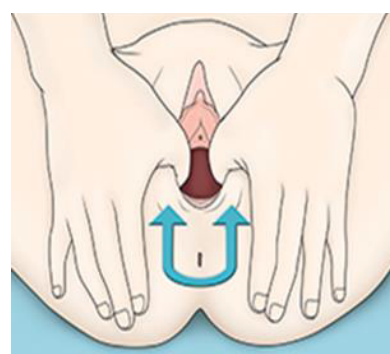
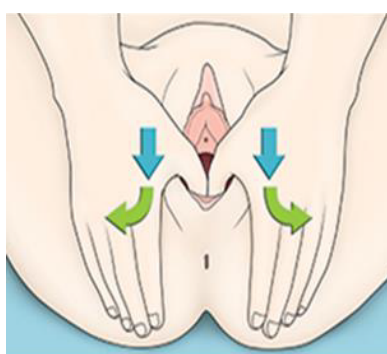
- Clean hands.
- An empty bladder.
- Lubricant or oil such as coconut, olive or vegetable oil.
- You can do this with a mirror by yourself or ask your partner to help.

Discuss with your midwife or obstetrician prior to massage if any of the below apply to your pregnancy:

- placenta praevia
- bleeding from the vagina
- have a vaginal infection
- suspect your waters have broken
- are less than 34 weeks pregnant.

How do I perform perineal massage?

1. Empty your bladder and wash your hands.
2. Use pillows to set up in a comfortable reclined position. You can also sit on the toilet or stand with one foot raised on a stool.
3. Apply oil or lubricant to your thumbs and perineum. Try to relax your pelvic floor muscles.
4. Use your thumbs or have your partner place both index fingers approximately three to four centimetres into the vagina.
5. Press downwards towards the anus. While maintaining the pressure separate your fingers to stretch the perineum downwards and outwards in a 'U' shaped movement.
6. Apply enough pressure so that a light stretching sensation is felt, it should not be painful. You may feel a slight burning, tingling or stinging sensation
7. Hold the stretch for one to two minutes then release. Massage with more lubricant over the lower half of the vagina then stretch again continuing the massage for approximately 5-10 minutes.
8. Repeat the massage no more than twice weekly.



Further Information

The information provided in this information sheet is general only. If you have any questions regarding this information, please discuss with your midwife or obstetrician.

Sources:

Auckland District Health, Women's Healthcare Australasia,

Acknowledgements

Produced by: WMH Perineal Protection Working Group

Date produced: June 2022

Date for review: June 2024