

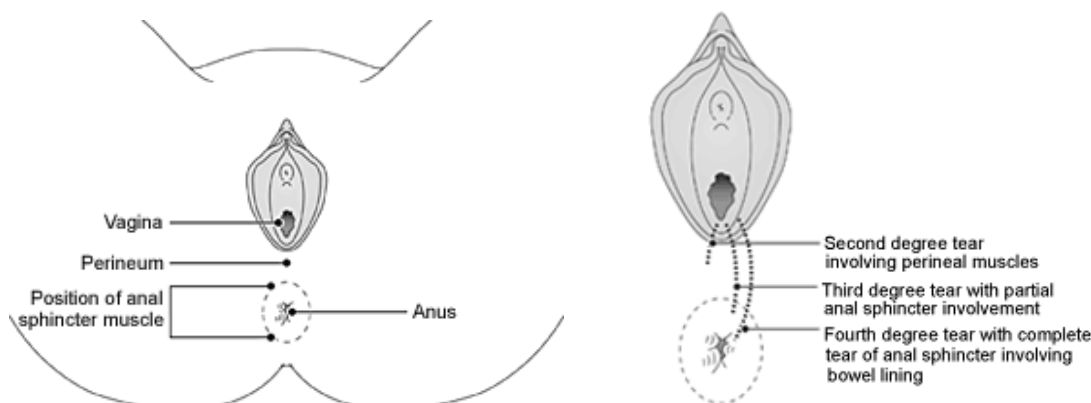
Your important health information

Physiotherapy after vaginal delivery

What is the perineum and pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a sling of muscles that help to support your pelvic organs and assist with bladder and bowel control. The perineum is the area of skin between the vagina and anus. (See diagram)

A first degree tear involves the skin of the perineum and/or vagina. A second degree tear and an episiotomy involve the skin of the perineum and/or vagina and the pelvic floor muscles. Swelling is common after such vaginal deliveries. Weak pelvic floor muscles can lead to difficulty with the control of wind, urinary and/or faecal incontinence.



(Source: RWH website)

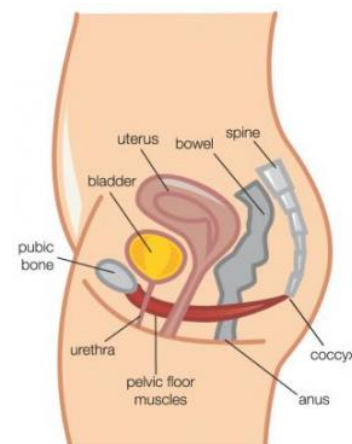
What you can do to assist your recovery

1. Reduce pain, swelling and inflammation by

- **Rest:** lie down on your back, side or stomach for two hours during the day for the first two weeks and one hour during the day from two to eight weeks.
- **Ice:** apply an ice pack, wrapped in gauze or face towel, to the perineum for 20 minutes every two to four hours for the first 72 hours after birth. Continue if swelling persists.
Do not put ice directly against skin.
- **Compression:** wear firm supportive underwear for the first 6 weeks.
- Take **pain relief** medication regularly as prescribed by your doctor.

2. Commence your pelvic floor exercise program

- Start **pelvic floor exercises** 48 hours after birth in a comfortable horizontal position.
- Squeeze and tighten around your back passage and vagina, lifting and drawing forwards and upwards. Keep breathing normally and ensure your legs and buttocks are relaxed.



- Try to hold for three seconds, rest for 6 seconds and repeat three times. This is the first set.
- Repeat this set four times a day.

Progress these exercises by increasing the length of the hold and the number of repetitions as you are able. You should have a distinct feeling of 'letting go' of the muscle before you progress.

3. Avoid constipation and straining

- **Drink** at least two litres of fluid daily (water, juice, milk). Minimise caffeine intake to one to two caffeinated drinks per day.
- Eat a **high fibre diet** (fruit, vegetables, wholemeal grains and cereals). Try to include fibre with each meal.
- **Avoid straining** during your bowel motion. Adopt a good position on the toilet (see diagram)
 - Lean forward with a straight back
 - Rest your arms on your thighs
 - Raise your heels coming up onto your toes, so that your knees are higher than your hips
 - To empty, relax your abdominals and bulge your tummy out. It can help to support your perineum with your hand.



4. Avoid straining with heavy lifting

- Try to minimise lifting anything heavier than your baby for the first 6 weeks. Heavy lifting can place further pressure on your perineum and pelvic floor whilst it is recovering.

5. Attend the physiotherapy postnatal class

- Learn key information about safe and effective post-natal recovery.
- Please check class times with your midwife or physiotherapist. You can attend the class whilst an inpatient or come in from home.
- Sometimes new mothers need physiotherapy care for ongoing problems after childbirth. Contact the Physiotherapy Department (phone numbers below) within the first three months after the birth of your baby if you experience:
 - bladder or bowel problems
 - passing urine frequently or urgently, incontinence of urine
 - urgency to use bowel, incontinence of wind or bowel motion
 - vaginal "heaviness" or prolapse
 - pain during intercourse.

Further information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

Physiotherapy Department
 Mercy Hospital for Women
 Phone: 03 8458 4141

Werribee Mercy Hospital
 Phone: 03 8754 3150

Acknowledgements

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