



Perineal massage during pregnancy

Practising perineal massage towards the end of your pregnancy can help prepare you for labour and birth. This fact sheet explains what it is and how to do it.

What is perineal massage?

The perineum is the area between your vaginal opening and your anus. This area stretches during childbirth as your baby's head is being born.

Regular massage to the perineum in the later stages of your pregnancy can increase blood flow to the area. This may help the tissue stretch more easily during birth.

What are the benefits of perineal massage?

Research shows that, for first vaginal births, people who practise perineal massage from 34 weeks of pregnancy are less likely to need an episiotomy.

They are also less likely to experience more severe perineal tears involving the muscles around the anus (known as third- and fourth-degree tears).

Other benefits of perineal massage include:

- helping you become familiar with the sensations of your perineum
- helping to ease burning and stinging sensations as your baby's head is born
- reducing the need for stitches after childbirth
- decreasing the chance of ongoing perineal pain after birth.

When should you start?

We recommend perineal massage every 1-2 days from 34 weeks of pregnancy (but not before). It can be done by you or your partner.

Are there any reasons not to do perineal massage?

You should not do perineal massage if you have any of the following conditions:

- placenta praevia (a low-lying placenta), or any unexplained vaginal bleeding during the second half of pregnancy
- vaginal herpes, thrush, or any other vaginal infection - massage could make the infection worse.

If you are unsure about any of these conditions, please speak with your midwife or pregnancy care team before starting perineal massage.

How do you do perineal massage?

You can use a mirror the first few times to help you become familiar with your perineal area.

Remember to take slow, deep breaths while massaging. This will help to relax your muscles.

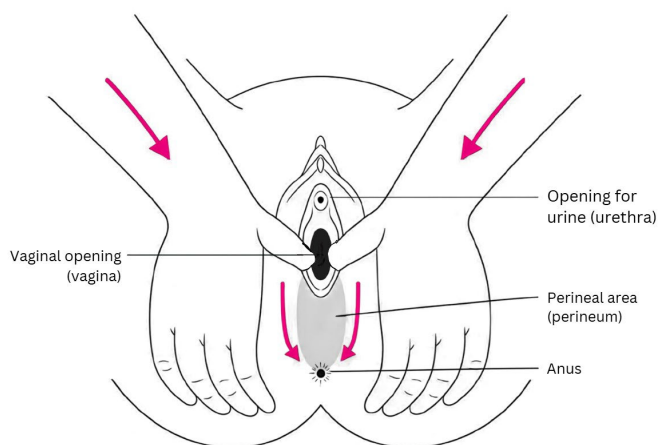
Before you start

- Empty your bladder.
- Make sure your fingernails are trimmed and that your hands are clean.

- You will need some lubricant. This can be a natural edible oil such as almond, olive or coconut oil, or a water-based lubricant.
- Find a comfortable, relaxed environment – this could be sitting up in bed with your hips propped up with pillows or sitting up in a warm bath.
- If you are not doing the massage in a bath, put a warm cloth (e.g. a clean face washer) on your perineum for around 10 minutes before starting the massage. This will help relax the area.

How to do the massage

1. Use your fingers to put some lubricant on your perineum.
2. Insert your fingers (or thumbs) about 3–4 cm into your vagina.
3. Gently press downwards towards your anus. You may feel a slight tingling or burning sensation - this is normal.
4. Next, press outwards to the sides. Hold this stretch for 45–60 seconds.
5. You can then start massaging in a U-shaped pattern, applying downward and outward pressure to the inside of your vagina (see diagram below).



6. Continue this massage for 5–10 minutes (if you are comfortable). You can use as much lubricant as you need.

Pelvic floor exercises

Research also shows that combining perineal massage with pelvic floor exercises can reduce the chance of perineal trauma during birth.

Please see our pelvic floor exercises fact sheet (link below) for more about these exercises. It is available in several languages.

For more information

The Royal Women's website

Pelvic floor exercises – fact sheet

<https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#pelvic-floor-exercises>

Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732

1800respect.org.au

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.

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