

Prenatal Perineal Massage

Perineal massage is a technique which slowly and gently softens the tissues of the perineum in preparation for the stresses of birth. Perineal massage may help to reduce the risk of tearing during birth and reduce the need for an episiotomy (“stitches”). It also helps prepare you for the feelings of pressure and stretching that occur as your baby’s head is being born.

Perineal massage is unusual and personal and some women or couples may find it distasteful and may not wish to try it. Others feel it is worthwhile if it can reduce the chances of having an episiotomy or serious tear.

Caution:

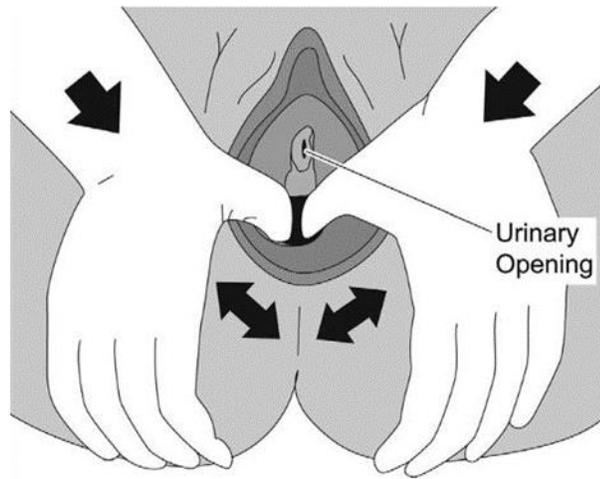
Do NOT do perineal massage if you have a vaginal infection, active herpes lesions, or other vaginal infections as perineal massage could worsen or spread the condition.

Hints:

- either you or your partner can do the massage
- the first few times perineal massage is done it is helpful to take a mirror and look at your perineum so you know what you are doing
- be sure your fingernails are short
- take a warm bath prior to doing perineal massage if you feel tense
- give extra attention previous episiotomy scar

Instructions:

- wash your hands before beginning
- make yourself comfortable in a semi-sitting position, squatting against a wall, or standing with one foot raised and resting on the tub, toilet, or a chair.
- lubricate your fingers well with a water-soluble jelly (such as KY jelly) vitamin E oil, or pure vegetable oil. Do NOT use baby oil, mineral oil, or petroleum jelly. Avoid contaminating the oil by squirting the oil over your fingers rather than dipping your hands in the oil.
- place your thumbs well inside the vagina (about 3-4 cm); move them upward along the sides of the vagina in a rhythmic U or sling-type movement (see diagram below). Partners can use either the index fingers or thumbs. This movement stretches the vaginal tissue, the muscles surrounding the vagina, and the skin of the perineum. You can also massage by rubbing the skin of the perineum between the thumb and forefinger (thumb on the inside, finger on the outside or vice versa). Initially, you will feel tight, but with time and practice, the tissue will relax and stretch.



- it's important to concentrate on relaxing your muscles as you feel the pressure. As you become more comfortable doing perineal massage, gently and firmly increase the pressure just enough to make the perineum begin to sting from the stretching (this same stinging sensation occurs as the baby's head is being born).
- Remember to avoid the urinary opening
- Massage for about five minutes, once a day
- Perineal massage should be started around the 34th week of pregnancy