

Antenatal Perineal Massage

What is Perineal Massage?

Perineal massage is the gentle stretching and massage of the perineum, which is the skin between the vagina and the anus. Evidence from research suggests that perineal massage:

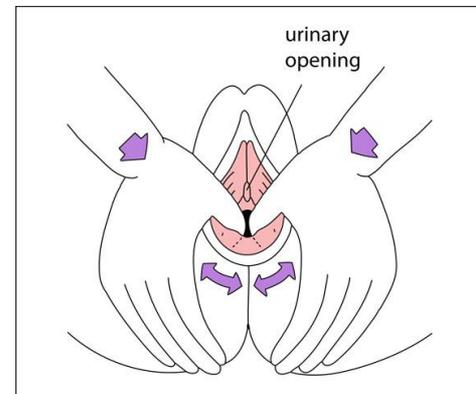
- Increases the elasticity of the perineum.
- May reduce the likelihood of perineal injury requiring stitches.
- Reduces the likelihood of an episiotomy (perineal cut).
- Reduces the likelihood of experiencing ongoing perineal pain at 3 months following birth, including women who have had a previous vaginal birth.

Perineal massage is particularly effective for women having their first vaginal birth. Massaging the perineum can be started at 35 weeks gestation and should be done 3-4 times a fortnight.

How is it done?

A bath or warm cloth prior to the massage may help the perineum relax.

1. Wash your hands and find a quiet and relaxing place to perform the massage.
2. Sit in a comfortable supported position. You may prefer to stand with one leg on a chair. A mirror can be useful to help identify the vaginal opening and the perineum.
3. Apply a lubricant onto your thumbs and perineum before starting the massage. A water-based lubricant or almond oil is recommended.
4. Place one or two thumbs approximately 3-5cms into the vaginal opening.
5. Press the perineum downwards towards the anus and to the sides.
6. Massage in a 'U' shaped movement while maintaining the stretch pressure. The massage should create a stretching feeling, but not pain. Some women feel a burning sensation when they first start massaging. This should decrease over time. Focus on relaxing the pelvic floor muscles and allowing the tissues to stretch. Continue massaging for about 5 minutes.
7. Your partner can assist you or perform the massage for you if you are both comfortable with this. It may be easier for them to use their index and middle fingers. You can guide them as to how much pressure to apply.



DO NOT PERFORM PERINEAL MASSAGE IF YOU have ruptured your membranes or have active genital herpes, thrush or any other vaginal infection. Massage could spread the infection and worsen the condition.

The following animations may assist you:

Perineal Massage – self stretch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6XiQg004fs>

Perineal Massage – partner stretch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kufJr5HE2Uc>

References

1. Aquino, C., Guida, M., Saccone, G., Fulvio, Cruz, Y., Vitaglinano, A., Zullo, F. and Berghella, V. (2018) . Perineal massage during labor: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *The Journal of Maternal-Fetal & Neonatal Medicine*. DOI: 10.1080/14767058.2018.1512574.
2. Beckmann, M. M & Stock, O. M. (2013). Antenatal perineal massage for reducing perineal trauma. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. Apr 30; 4:CD005123 (accessed 04/09/2018)
3. Queensland Health (2018) *Queensland Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Guideline: Perineal Care* (accessed 04/09/2018).