

Prenatal Perineal Massage

Partner Massage

- Read carefully the instructions for self-massage.
- Listen sensitively to your partner and be guided by her. It is her body. Massage is firm but gentle. She will tell you how much pressure to apply.
- You may use either your index fingers or thumbs.

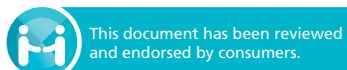
Instructions:

- Wash your hands and clip nails.
- Put some lubricant on your fingers and your partner's perineum.
- Gently place your index fingers about 3cm inside her vagina.

- Press down towards her back passage until she says it is starting to sting or burn. It should not be painful. Hold the pressure there for about 1–2 minutes until she tells you it is becoming numb.
- Maintaining a steady pressure, slowly sweep your fingers along the sides of the lower part of her vagina in a 'U' shaped movement. Be sure to avoid the urinary opening.
- In the beginning she will feel tight, but with time and regular practice her perineum will become more elastic and supple and you will be able to insert your fingers more easily.

For more information

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Prenatal Perineal Massage

The perineum is the area of skin between your vagina and back passage. During birth your perineum thins out and stretches over your baby's presenting part, usually their head.

Prenatal perineal massage helps make the skin and tissues around your vagina more supple and elastic by slowly and gently stretching them. The massage may help avoid tears or the need for an episiotomy "stitches", and you are more likely to deliver with an intact perineum. Medical research supports the benefits of perineal massage.

Other benefits:

- Familiarizes you with the stretching and pressure sensations that occur as your baby is born. This can help you to relax while giving birth instead of tensing yourself.
- May reduce the stinging sensation during birth.
- Delivering with an intact perineum helps to decrease the risk of blood loss, and the risk of infection and pain in the perineum.

Cautions:

- Do not massage if you have any active vaginal infection, genital herpes or thrush as you may cause the infection to spread.
- Avoid any pressure on your urinary opening as you could cause irritation or infection.
- Massage gently, as vigorous massage could cause bruising or swelling.

Self-massage

Create the right atmosphere with soft lighting (e.g. candle light) and aromatherapy (e.g. lavender) to aid relaxation.

- Have a warm bath or apply warm compresses to your perineum for 5–10 minutes to soften the skin and tissues and to help you relax.
- Wash your hands and clip nails short.
- Choose a warm and comfortable position, and lean back with legs bent, open and relaxed.
- Use a mirror to become familiar with yourself and the massage.
- Use natural oil such as olive or pure vegetable oil or KY jelly on your thumbs and perineum for lubrication. Avoid baby oil, mineral oil or petroleum oils or nut based oils if you have a known allergy.
- Place your thumbs about 3cm inside your vagina. Press downwards towards your back passage, gently separating

your thumbs to take them to the sides of your vagina. Keep stretching firmly but gently until you feel a slight burning, tingling or stinging sensation. The stretching should not be painful. Stretch slowly, breathing gently, and try to consciously relax your muscles.

- Hold the pressure steady with your thumbs for about 2 minutes, until the area becomes a little numb and the tingling lessens. Release if you need to.
- Keep pressing with your thumbs. Massage slowly and gently over the lower half of your vagina in a 'U' shape, working the lubricant into your tissues. Do this for about 3–4 minutes.
- As you massage, hook your thumbs at the side of your vagina and pull these tissues forward. This helps stretch the skin as your baby's head will do during birth.
- Try to massage once a day, starting from around the 34th week of your pregnancy.

Other important points:

- As you do the massage in the first 2 – 3 weeks you may experience difficulties such as pain, burning sensations, finger and wrist cramps, and difficulty reaching your vagina. **Persevere**, as your vaginal entrance will increase in elasticity and suppleness by 2 – 4 weeks and the massage becomes easier as you gain increased tolerance to the stretch.

Using a bath during labour can soften the perineal area, making it easier to stretch during birth.

- Continue daily pelvic floor exercises. This helps greatly in preventing incontinence (bladder control problems) and further familiarizes you with your pelvic floor area. Also practice relaxing your pelvic floor muscles between each hold.
- **Information on how to exercise your pelvic floor muscles is available from the Physiotherapy Department.**

