

Antenatal Perineal Massage

Information for patients



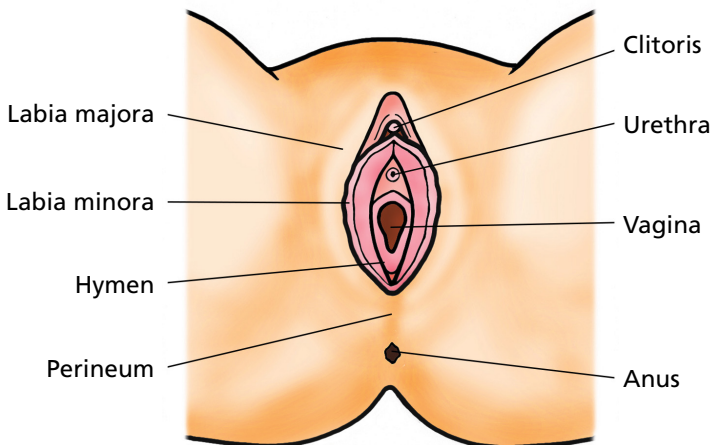
Leeds
Maternity Care

Perineal massage during pregnancy may help to gradually soften and stretch the vagina and perineum in preparation for vaginal childbirth. This leaflet aims to explain the potential benefits of this and give information on how and when to perform the massage.

What is the perineum?

The perineum is the area of skin and muscles between your vagina and anus (opening to your back passage). This area naturally stretches to allow your baby's head and body to be born. This stretching can result in tears to the perineum and vagina if the skin is unable to stretch enough to accommodate the birth of the baby.

At times when the baby needs to be born quickly or assistance is required in the birth, a small cut called an episiotomy is made in this area.



What are the benefits of perineal massage?

It is estimated that around 90% of women will have some trauma (tear or episiotomy) to their perineum during vaginal childbirth. Up to two thirds of these women will require stitches.

Perineal massage is a way of preparing the perineum to stretch more easily during vaginal birth. It may also help you to become familiar with the feeling of pressure or stretching of the perineum that you will feel during the birth of your baby.

Research has shown that regular perineal massage during the last few weeks of pregnancy reduces the likelihood of the need for an episiotomy and the incidence of perineal tears that require stitches. Studies have suggested perineal massage to be particularly beneficial in women having their first vaginal birth.

Perineal massage has also been shown to reduce perineal pain in the months following childbirth for women who have had more than one vaginal birth. If you have previously had a perineal tear or episiotomy you can perform antenatal perineal massage if you feel comfortable to do so.

Do not perform perineal massage if you think your waters may have broken, you have thrush, herpes or any other vaginal infection. Please contact the Maternity Assessment Centre (MAC) if you suspect any of these conditions.

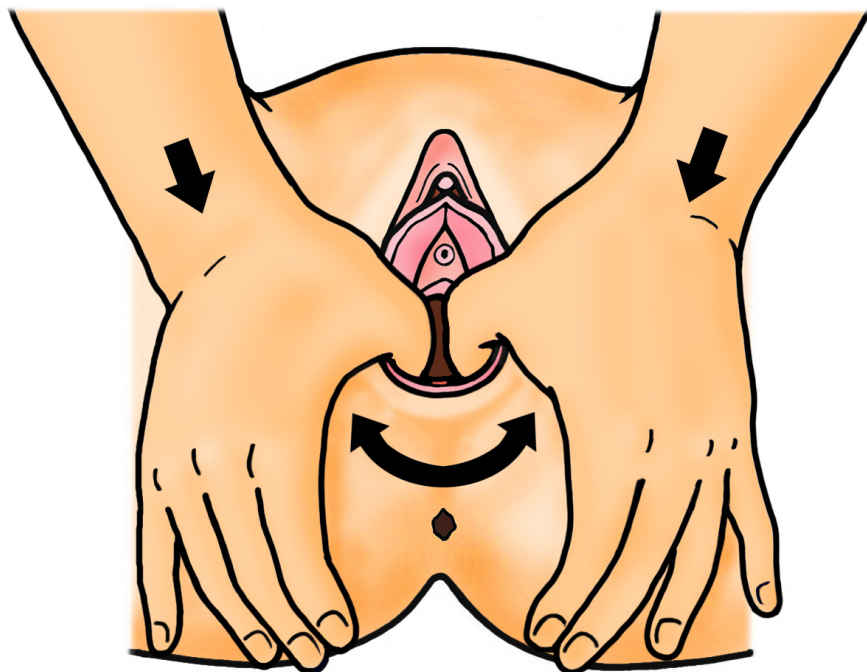
When do I start perineal massage?

You can start any time after 34 weeks of pregnancy and should massage 3-4 times a week for 5-10 minutes each time. However, even undertaking the massage once or twice a week may be of benefit. There are no known risks from massaging your perineum.

How do I do perineal massage?

- The first few times you may find it easier to use a mirror and look at your perineum during massaging. It is entirely up to you if you wish your partner to assist you in the massage.
- Ensure your bladder is empty and wash your hands before you start.
- Adopt a comfortable position: the massage can be done in several positions; sitting, lying supported by pillows, squatting against a wall or standing with one foot raised and resting on the bath or toilet.
- You may find it more comfortable to undertake the massage after a bath or shower, as the warmth of the water can aid in softening the surrounding tissues.
- You can use olive oil, sunflower oil or sweet almond oil as lubrication (Do not use sweet almond oil if you have a nut allergy); if you are sensitive to any of these you can use a water-soluble lubricant jelly. **Do not use baby oil, mineral oil, petroleum jelly or other petroleum based products.**
- If you are doing the massage yourself it is probably easiest to use your thumbs. Otherwise your partner can use both index fingers.

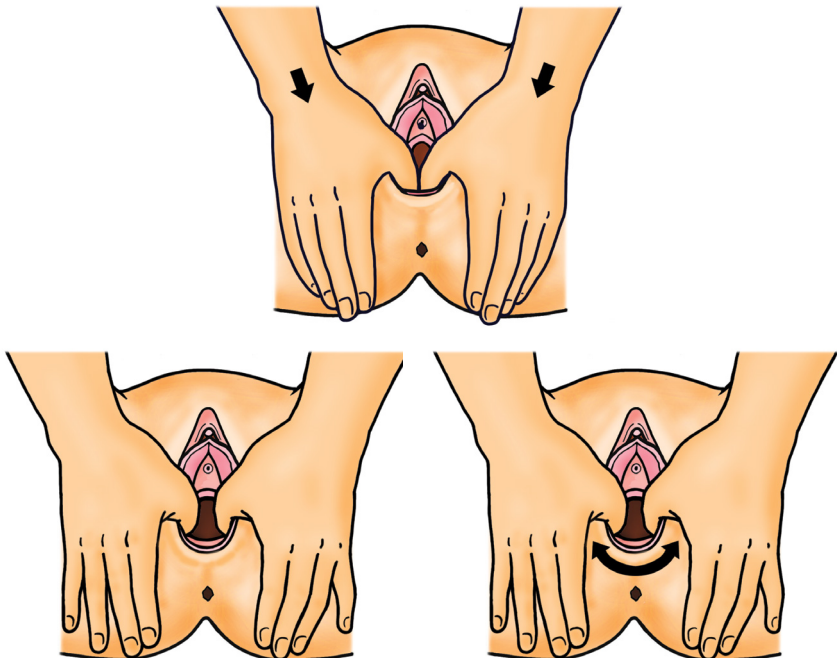
- Place the fingers or thumbs about 5cm into the vagina (up to your second knuckle) and press downwards on the back wall towards the back passage so you can feel a stretch in the muscles around the vagina. This may tingle but should not hurt and may help you prepare for the feeling when your baby is ready to be born.
- Once you have felt this downward pressure, use your thumbs to go from right to left in a sweeping 'U' shaped movement.



- You can also go on to massage the skin of the perineum between the thumb and forefingers.

Remember

- The perineum may feel tight when you first start, but with continued massage you will begin to feel a difference in the stretch of the tissues.
- If you feel pain during any part of perineal massage, stop and try again another time. Use more oil/lubricant if required to reduce friction.
- If you have any questions or find the massage frightening or distressing, please discuss this with your community midwife. Only undertake perineal massage if you feel comfortable to do so.
- Continue to do regular pelvic floor exercises before and after your pregnancy.



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