

PERINEAL TEARS

THIRD AND FOURTH DEGREE TEARS

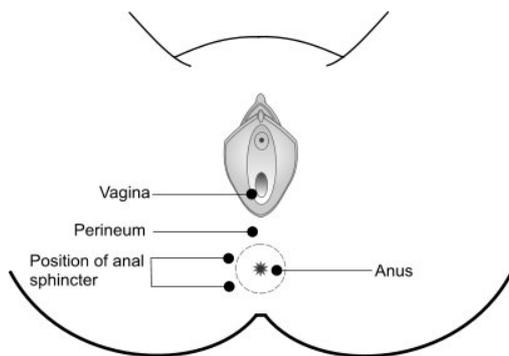


the women's
the royal women's hospital
victoria australia

What is a third or fourth degree tear?

Sometimes during a vaginal birth, the area between the vagina and the anus may tear.

- A third-degree tear involves partial tearing of the anal sphincter (a group of muscles that help control the opening to the anal canal).
- A fourth-degree tear involves injury to the anal sphincter and into the anal canal.



Your care after a tear

A doctor will explain the type of tear you have and how to care for yourself. They will recommend medicines to help with pain, prevent constipation and reduce the risk of infection.

Do not take medicines that need to be inserted into your anus.

A physiotherapist, midwife, pharmacist and, in some cases, a dietitian will also be involved in your care.

They will talk to you about how to:

- avoid constipation (you may need a special diet)
- help your wound to heal
- use ice for pain relief and to decrease swelling
- bathe and keep the affected area clean
- do pelvic floor exercises and when to start them.

The first six weeks

The first six weeks after the birth of your baby are important for muscle and soft tissue recovery.

Rest

Lie down as much as you can during the first few days. This will help reduce swelling and discomfort. Aim for an hour each morning and afternoon during the first six weeks after your baby's birth.

Ice

If you feel swelling or pain around the perineum, use an ice pack placed inside a pad for 20 to 30 minutes. Ensure it is not in direct contact with your skin. Do this every two to three hours while you are awake.

Compression

Firm supportive underwear such as shapewear or compression wear will support the area and can reduce swelling.

Exercise

Pelvic floor exercises help to stimulate blood supply to the perineum which is important for healing. It is safe to start these exercises one to two days after the birth. It is important not to strain the muscles of your pelvic floor and perineum. Avoid constipation, heavy lifting (e.g. older children, shopping bags, washing baskets) and high impact exercise.

Diet

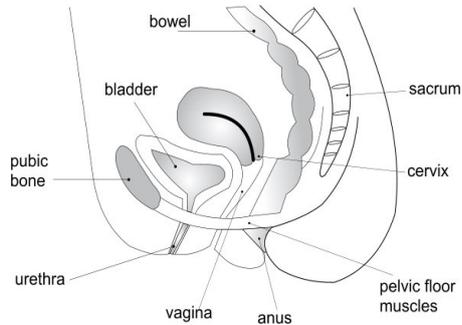
If you have a third or fourth degree tear you may need to eat a low fibre diet for the first seven to ten days. This will reduce the need to use your bowels and will put less strain on the affected area. To avoid constipation while you are healing the diet will be combined with a gentle laxative. A dietitian will explain the diet to you before you leave hospital. After ten days, move gradually to a high fibre diet so that your bowel function returns to normal.

Sex

Sex should be avoided until after your first follow-up appointment in the Perineal Clinic.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

The pelvic floor muscles are an important group of muscles deep inside the pelvis. They support the pelvic organs and help you control your bladder and bowel. These exercises are important for your recovery after the birth of your baby.



Gentle program – days two to five

Lie down on your back with your knees bent up or lie on your side.



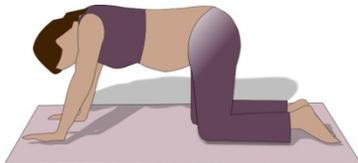
Gently tighten the muscles around your vagina and anus – it should feel like you are closing them. Stop if you feel any pain. Hold the muscle tight for up to three seconds then slowly release. Relax for five seconds and then repeat up to 10 times.

Repeat this exercise three times each day.

Getting stronger – days five to fourteen

You will now feel more confident exercising your pelvic floor muscles and can begin to work harder with each exercise.

Lie on your back (as above) or on your hands and knees.



Tighten the muscles around your vagina and anus as much as you can, you should feel the pelvic floor muscles inside you 'lift up'. Hold for three to six seconds, then relax – you should feel your muscles 'let go'. Repeat 10 times and relax for five seconds between each repetition.

Repeat this exercise three times a day.

Recovery program – weeks three to six

Progress your exercise program to tighten more strongly, and hold for longer. Aim to hold for five to ten seconds and repeat ten times.

Repeat this exercise three times a day in different positions, such as sitting and standing. Also, tighten your pelvic floor when coughing or lifting.

Normal bowel function

Constipation and straining when on the toilet can weaken your pelvic floor. Good bowel habits help you protect your pelvic floor and reduce the risk of both bladder and bowel incontinence.

- Gradually increase the fibre in your food if you have been on a low fibre diet
- Foods high in fibre include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, prunes and natural fibre supplements such as psyllium
- Drink 1.5 to 2 litres of water a day
- Enjoy some daily exercise such as walking
- Don't ignore the urge to go to the toilet
- Take your time when going to the toilet to make sure you are completely empty.

When you are on the toilet:

- Use a foot stool so your knees are above your hips
- Sit leaning forward, with your feet apart and elbows on your knees
- Allow your tummy to relax
- Don't hold your breath. Sigh deeply or make a hissing sound
- Support your stitches with your hand particularly when opening your bowels.



For patients of the Women's

Your follow-up appointments are important. At these consultations you will be asked about your bladder and bowel function, and have the opportunity to ask questions about returning to intercourse or future pregnancies.

- **Postnatal Physiotherapy Class**
A physiotherapist will give information and answer questions you may have.
- **Perineal Clinic - Physiotherapy Appointment**
A physiotherapist will assess you and discuss your recovery and goals.
- **Perineal Clinic - Urogynaecologist Appointment**
A doctor will assess you and talk to you about any concerns. You may have an ultrasound to check how the tear has healed.
This is an important review and we encourage you to attend even if you feel you have completely healed.

Please contact the Perineal Clinic if you do not receive your appointment times.

If you need more information or advice

Physiotherapy Department

T: (03) 8345 3160
Monday to Friday 8.30am - 5.00pm

Perineal Clinic

T: (03) 8345 3144
Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5.00pm