

Practising perineal massage during your pregnancy



the women's
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This fact sheet explains the benefits of practising perineal massage towards the end of your pregnancy in preparation for your labour and birth.

What are the benefits of performing perineal massage?

The perineum is the area between your vaginal opening and your anus. This area stretches during childbirth as your baby's head is being born. Regular massage to the perineal area in the later stages of your pregnancy can increase the blood flow to the perineum. This prepares the skin and underlying tissues for the stretching and widening of the vaginal opening that occurs during the birth of your baby.

Those experiencing their first vaginal birth, who practice perineal massage from 34 weeks of pregnancy, can lower the risk of needing an episiotomy or serious tearing. Other benefits of perineal massage include:

- Assisting you to become familiar with the sensations of your perineum.
- Helping to ease burning and stinging sensations as your baby's head is being born.
- Reducing the need for stitches after childbirth.
- Decreasing the chance of ongoing perineal pain after birth.

Is there any reason I should not practice perineal massage?

Perineal massage should not be commenced before 34 weeks of pregnancy, or if you have any of the following:

- Placenta praevia (a low-lying placenta) or any other condition where there is bleeding from the vagina during the second half of pregnancy.
- Vaginal herpes, thrush, or any other vaginal infection, as massage could spread the infection and worsen the condition.
- Severe blood pressure problems in pregnancy.

If you are unsure about any of these pregnancy conditions, please speak with your midwife or pregnancy care team before commencing perineal massage.

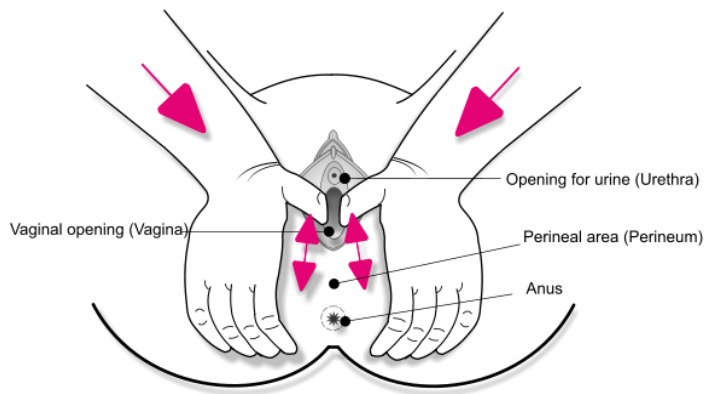
When do I perform perineal massage?

Perineal massage every 1-2 days is recommended from 34 weeks of pregnancy, if comfortable. It can be performed by you or your partner. Remember to try and relax while performing the massage.

How do I perform perineal massage?

- Empty your bladder before you start.
- Make sure your fingernails are trimmed and that your hands are clean.
- Use a mirror the first few times to help you become familiar with your perineal area.
- Find a comfortable, relaxed environment – this could be sitting up in bed with your hips propped up with pillows or sitting up in a warm bath.
- If not performing the perineal massage in a warm bath, apply a warm compress like a clean face washer to the perineal area. Do this for around ten minutes before commencing the massage to help relax the perineum.
- Use your fingers to apply the lubricant to your perineum. This could be a natural edible oil such as almond, olive or coconut oil, or a water-based lubricant.
- Commence massaging the area by inserting 1-2 fingers or your thumbs about 3-4 cm inside your vagina.
- Press your fingers down towards your anus. You may feel a slight tingling or burning sensation which is normal.

- Also, press outwards to the sides. Hold this stretch for 45-60 seconds.
- Take slow, deep breaths while massaging. This will help to relax your muscles.
- Then start to move your fingers in a U-shaped pattern, continuing to apply downward and outward pressure.
- Apply more lubricant as needed and continue this massage for 5-10 minutes.



Pelvic Floor Exercises

Research also shows that combining pelvic floor exercises and perineal massage during your pregnancy can help to prepare you for labour and birth and reduce the possibility of a significant tear occurring.

See our Pelvic floor exercises fact sheet for more about these exercises at thewomens.org.au/fs-pelvic-floor-exercises. It's available in several languages.



For more information

Women's Welcome Centre (Victoria Only)

Royal Women's Hospital

T: (03) 8345 3037 or 1800 442 007 (Rural Callers)

E: wwcadmin@thewomens.org.au

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

Support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

T: 1800 737 732 (24-hour Support Service)

W: 1800respect.org.au

Do you need an interpreter?



If you need an interpreter, remember you can ask for one.

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Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.

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