

# Antenatal perineal massage



## **Who is this leaflet for?**

This leaflet is for patients in the later stages of pregnancy. Research has shown that perineal massage from 34 weeks of pregnancy reduces the chance of trauma to this area during birth (either a tear or bruising). This can be very beneficial, especially if having your first baby. It can also aid recovery following delivery.

This leaflet explains what perineal massage is, how and when to do it, and aims to answer any common questions you may have.

## **What is the perineum and pelvic floor?**

The perineum is the area of tissue between your vagina and anus (opening to your back passage). It connects with the muscles of your pelvic floor. The pelvic floor is the hammock of muscles which supports your bladder and bowel.

## **What is perineal massage?**

Perineal massage is a way of preparing your perineum to stretch more easily in childbirth. During birth, the perineal tissue needs to relax and open to allow your baby to pass through your vagina.

## **What are the benefits?**

- It increases the elasticity (stretchiness) of the perineum. It improves the perineum's blood flow and ability to stretch more easily during the birth of your baby.
- Tears in the perineum are less likely, reducing the need for an episiotomy (cut).
- It aids in focusing on the feeling of letting the perineum open up.
- The perineum is less likely to be painful after the birth of your baby.
- It can be particularly helpful if you have previous scar tissue or a rigid perineum.

## **When should I start?**

Evidence shows that perineal massage up to an average of once to twice a week can lead to up to 16% reduction in the incidence of perineal trauma, requiring suturing (stitching).

You can start from 34 weeks of your pregnancy.

Perineal massage can be done by you or your partner, if you are comfortable with this.

## **When should I do it?**

A good time is during or after a bath or shower because blood vessels in the area are dilated. This makes the perineum softer.

It is recommended to use a small amount of unscented, organic oil, for example, sunflower or grapeseed oil, to lubricate the area and ensure the massage is more comfortable. Unscented personal lubricant, such as K-Y jelly can also be used. Make sure that hands are cleaned thoroughly prior to commencing any internal massage.

## **Comfortable positions include:**

- Propped up with pillows on a bed or a sofa with your knees bent out and supported.
- Resting back in the bath with one leg up on the side. Then change legs.
- Standing under a warm shower with one leg up on a stool and then change legs. Note that baths or showers may be slippery after using oils.

## How to do perineal massage

1. Adopt a comfortable and relaxed position, in a place where you feel safe, secure and will not be interrupted.
2. You might find it easier to use a mirror at first. Place one or both thumbs on and just within the back wall of your vagina, resting one or both forefingers on your buttocks. You may prefer to use only one hand.
3. Pressing down a little towards your rectum (back passage), gently massage by moving your thumb(s) and forefinger(s) together upwards and outwards and then back again, in a rhythmic 'U' shaped movement. You are aiming to massage the area inside your vagina, rather than the skin on the outside. However, you may still feel the stretching sensation on the skin on the outside.
4. Focus on relaxing your perineum as much as possible during the massage.



Perineal massage should be comfortable but you will feel a stretching feeling.

The massage can last as long as you wish but aim for around 5 minutes a time.

With time and practice, as your perineum becomes more elastic, you will increase your ability to relax and can increase the pressure towards your rectum.

## **When is perineal massage not advised?**

Do not do perineal massage if you have:

- vaginal herpes
- thrush or any other vaginal infections
- pain – if you feel any pain, discontinue massage and speak to your midwife.

## **Any questions?**

If you have any questions or need further information, please speak to your midwife.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

