



How To Prepare Your Perineal Tissues For Birth

The better you prepare your perineal tissues for the stretching of birth, the less they are likely to tear, and the better they will heal if they do. Like training muscles to perform at their best in an athletic event, conditioning the tissues around the vaginal opening with massage prepares the perineum to work to its best ability. Midwives report that women who practice perineal massage daily in the last six weeks of pregnancy experience less stinging sensation during crowning.

Mothers with a more conditioned perineum are less likely to tear or get an episiotomy. An added value of perineal massage is that it familiarises a woman with stretching sensations in this area so she can more easily relax these stretching muscles when stinging occurs just before the moment of birth.

Perineal Massage Technique:

- Wash your hands and trim your thumb/finger nails. Sit in a warm comfortable area, spreading your legs apart in a semi-sitting birthing position. To become familiar with your perineal area use a mirror for the first few massages (a floor-to-ceiling mirror works best). Use massage oil, such as pure vegetable oil, coconut oil or a water-soluble lubricant, such as K-Y Jelly (not a petroleum-based oil) on your fingers and thumbs and around your perineum.
- Insert your thumbs/fingers as deeply as you can inside your vagina and spread your legs. Press the perineal area down toward the rectum and then toward the sides in a gentle but firm arc. Gently continue to stretch this opening until you feel a slight burning/stretching sensation or tingling.
- Hold this stretch until the tingling subsides and gently massage in the same motion towards the lower part of the vaginal canal and then back and forth.
- While massaging, hook your thumbs/fingers onto the sides of the vaginal canal and gently pull these tissues forward towards your pubic bone, as your baby's head will do during delivery.
- Being too vigorous could cause bruising or swelling in these sensitive tissues so always increase the pressure gradually and make movements slow and fluid.
- During the massage, avoid pressure on the urethra as this could induce irritation or infection.
- As you become adept with this procedure, you can add Kegel exercises to your routine to help you get the feel for your pelvic muscles. Do this ritual daily beginning around week 34 of pregnancy.

(Adapted from The Birth Book by William and Martha Sears)

