

# Perineal Massage for Scars and Sensitivity

Information for patients

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NHS Lothian Pelvic Health Physiotherapists

This leaflet is designed to help you to decrease sensitivity in your perineum, the area between your vagina and anus. Sometimes you might feel sensitivity through your vulva and clitoris as well, the same techniques will apply.

Often when there is tension in the skin and other tissues, there can be increased tension in the whole body. Physiotherapists will usually give some ideas for full body relaxation to use alongside these techniques. It is important to keep up with your general relaxation and abdominal breathing as well as these techniques.

## **Perineal massage – general pointers**



- Wash your hands before starting
- Ensure you are well supported with pillows so you can reach your vagina and perineum easily
- Start by just applying gentle pressure along any area of tightness or tenderness. Stop at the edge of discomfort, not pushing into pain. Hold for 30 seconds, building up to 1 minute over a few sessions
- Ensure you stay relaxed, do not tense up whilst doing this
- Then make small circles moving the skin on or beside the scar. Start to gently and gradually increase the depth and range of the movement as able, stop at the edge of discomfort
- If you are extremely tender, you may only be able to touch the area very lightly to begin, without any movement. This is a great start and you will make the best progress if you work at the pace your body can accommodate. If this is not possible, continue to focus on your full body relaxation for a while before starting again.

- If the scar is painful- stop or ease off for a while
- Gradually over time, which can take a few weeks, you will be able to increase the pressure and movement with the massage
- Slow, steady pace is best. You are in control
- Make sure you are not using any products that would irritate your perineum or vulva (external genitalia). Avoid perfumes, coloured toilet paper, waxing, or shaving (trimming pubic hair is fine). Instead of soap, use a cleanser such as dermol 500 for the vulva. Your vagina is self-cleaning and does not require internal cleansing, douches or steaming, these can be dangerous and must be avoided.

Remember your sensitivity can change. Often women find they are more uncomfortable in the days leading up to their period. Be gentler with yourself on more sensitive days and use your less sensitive days to try to make progress. Come back to the massage any time you feel increased sensitivity or tightening.

To make the massage easier you can use a little oil such as almond or olive oil, but nothing that contains perfume or anything you are allergic to.

Some skin conditions, such as eczema, or an episode of thrush, can cause increased sensitivity in the vulva and perineum. It is important to see your GP and follow the recommended treatments. There may be some ongoing sensitivity which can be treated with massage.

## **Perineal tenderness associated with pelvic floor tension and painful sex**

Sometimes your pelvic floor can become tender as a result of muscle tension and tightness associated with previous experience and trauma, or with an unknown cause. Experiences of painful sex can cause ongoing pain and tenderness in the tissues. This often comes with pelvic floor muscle tension and there can be a cycle of tension and tenderness.

You may have heard the terms 'vulvodynia' (pain in the vulva) or 'vaginismus' (tightness and tension in the vagina and pelvic floor). Often these conditions come together.

By performing perineal massage, alongside other relaxation techniques, tenderness can be gradually reduced and you can slowly build towards sexual intercourse. You may also wish to try vaginal trainers (also known as dilators) and work with a psychosexual therapist. See your Physiotherapist for more information about these options.

The way your body processes and experiences pain is complex and dependent on many factors. If you feel you are not managing to address your pain by yourself, please seek help from a Physiotherapist.

## **Postnatal Scar desensitising and massage – from 4-6 weeks postnatal**

You will have been given leaflets to help with early management of perineal scars if this applied to you.

After an episiotomy or perineal tear the scar area can feel strange, numb or oversensitive. In order to try to help improve sensation and flexibility it is important to touch the area. Only begin scar massage after your scar is healed and there is no open wound. This is usually about 4-6 weeks postnatally.

Scar tissue is not as flexible as natural tissue due to the healing process, and can feel tight. Scar massage helps stretch this tightness and assists with proper tissue healing.

When to return to sexual intercourse after having a baby is a very personal decision. Try again when you feel ready. Most women experience some discomfort the first time after giving birth, so these techniques can be very helpful to prepare yourself and help give you an idea of when you are ready. You may find you need to use more lubrication postnatally, due to sensitivity and hormonal changes.

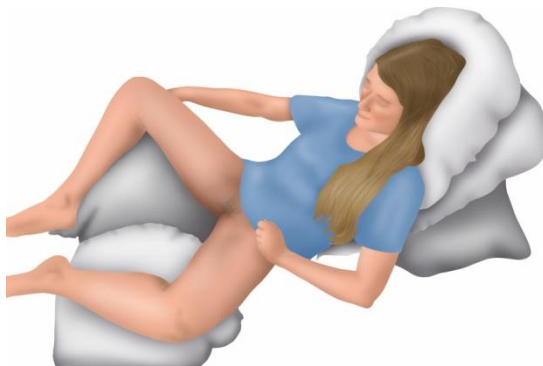
If you are over 6 months postnatal and still having problems, or if it is concerning you at any point, please seek advice from your GP or Women's Health Physiotherapist.

## **Perineal Massage**

Wash your hands and make sure your bladder is empty.



Find a private, comfortable place and sit or lean back in a comfortable position. Try to relax your body and breathe deeply into your abdomen while doing the massage. Ensure you are relaxed as you perform the massage. If you become tense, stop the massage and try again in a few days. If you find that you are more tender after doing the massage, do not worry, you will not have injured yourself. Take some pain relief and try again with a lighter touch in a few days.



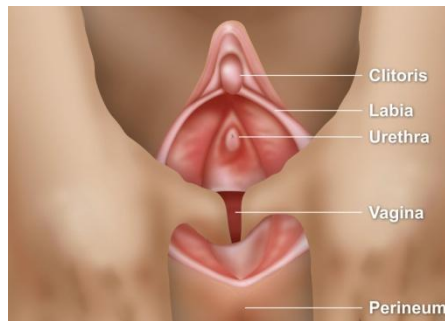
Put a lubricant such as almond or olive oil on your thumb(s) or index finger(s) and around the perineum. You can also use your body's own natural lubrication.

Do not use anything you know you are allergic to and avoid perfumes, glitter or any 'tingling' additives which are found in some lubricants. If unsure, test on a small area and continue with the massage after 48 hours if you have no reaction.

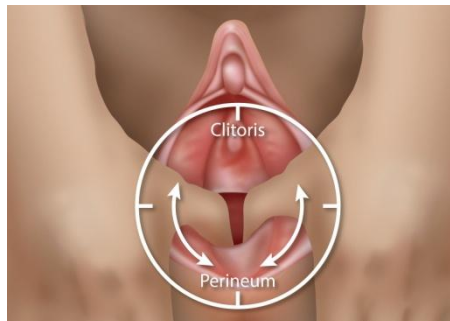
If you prefer, you can do this in the bath without lubricant.

Remember to stop at the point where you still feel relaxed and are not pushing into pain. A tolerable level of discomfort is fine, as long as you can stay relaxed with it. You may only be on step 1 for several weeks, this is normal. Alternatively, you may also find you can skip some points if they feel easy for you.

1. First apply very gentle pressure around the entrance to your vagina. If this is not tolerated, move a little further away until you find a point you can tolerate. Build up to tolerating this touch for 1-2 minutes before starting to insert your fingers vaginally.
2. Move the skin up and down, side to side and round in circles applying as much or as little pressure as feels right for you. Small movements are better to start with. If you have scars, start the movements near the scar, before progressing onto touching the scar itself if needed.
3. Place your thumb(s) or index finger(s) about 1-2 inches (3-5 cm) inside your vagina. Press downwards towards the back passage, moving your finger(s) to find the tender, sensitive or tight spots. Push into a tolerable discomfort, this might be very light initially. You may have several spots to treat



4. Hold the pressure steady at that point with your thumb(s) or finger(s) for about 1-2 minutes until the discomfort/tightness goes. If discomfort doesn't release after 2 minutes, move to another spot
5. Then while pressing with your thumb(s) or finger(s), use a sweeping motion with downward pressure to move in a rhythmic movement from 3 to 9 o'clock via 6 o'clock (where 12 o'clock is the clitoris and 6 o'clock is the perineum) and back again. This movement will encourage you to become more familiar with movement of the vaginal tissue and the muscles



6. You can also massage the skin of the perineum between the thumb and forefingers
7. As you massage, you can start to gently stretch the vaginal opening, not pushing into pain
8. Gradually over the days/weeks you should be able to increase the pressure you apply

9. Once you feel comfortable you can perform this massage daily (or at least 3 times a week) for 4-12 weeks, depending on the severity of your sensitivity at the start. If you want to involve your partner, make sure you show them this leaflet and that they understand that desensitising is a slow process and that you must be in control. This should be on your terms, make sure you give lots of feedback for what works and what doesn't. Your partner must stop if you ask them to and take a break if it does not feel right for you.
10. Any issues stop and speak with your physiotherapist.

## Further Information

For further information please contact your local department:

St John's Hospital: **01506 522 063**

Leith Community Treatment Centre: **0131 536 1060** option 1

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh: **0131 242 1945**

East Lothian Community Hospital: **01620 642 920**

Bonnyrigg Health Centre: **0131 537 9746**

This leaflet was compiled by St John's Hospital Physiotherapy Department, in association with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Services.

The leaflet can be made available in Braille and other languages. Please contact the physiotherapy department on **01506 522 063** for further information.

**Ref: Perineal Massage for Scars and Sensitivity**