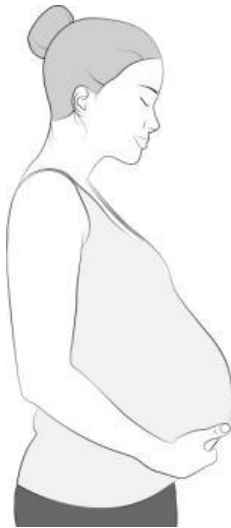


Perineal Massage in Pregnancy

Information for patients



NHS Lothian Pelvic Health Physiotherapists

This leaflet is designed to help you to prepare for the delivery of your baby by preparing you for the sensations of vaginal stretching at delivery. There is some evidence that it may help to reduce perineal tears/trauma. We generally recommend starting to practise this regularly from 35-36 weeks of pregnancy.

If you have a history of painful sex or scars from a previous delivery, please ask your Physiotherapist for the accompanying leaflet *Perineal massage for scars and sensitivity* and start with the techniques in that leaflet before progressing onto these techniques.

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 you begin
- Ensure you are well supported with pillows so you can reach your vagina easily. If you can't get round the bump, you might find standing with one leg up on a chair easier but ensure you feel well balanced and supported. If you suffer from pelvic girdle pain this position may not suit you
- Remember hormonal changes during pregnancy may make your tissues more sensitive than normal. If this massage is too uncomfortable please do not worry. So many more hormonal changes take place when in labour that your tissues will soften and feel entirely different at that time



- It is entirely optional to use these techniques – they are helpful for many women, but if you find it does not work for you, do not worry
- 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 and abdominal breathing
- 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.

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 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. When settled, try again with a lighter touch in a few days. If it doesn't settle, speak with your midwife and discuss pain relief you can use in pregnancy to settle it down.



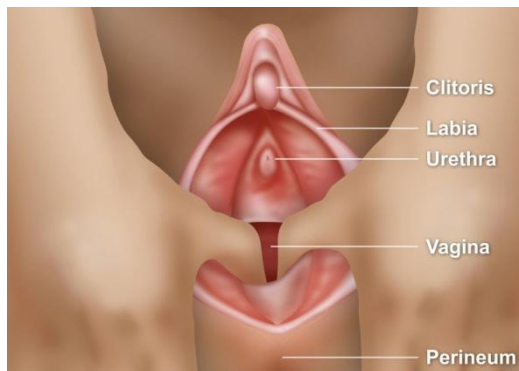
Put a lubricant such as almond or olive oil on your thumb(s) or index finger(s) and around the perineum. You can also use your body's own natural lubrication.

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.

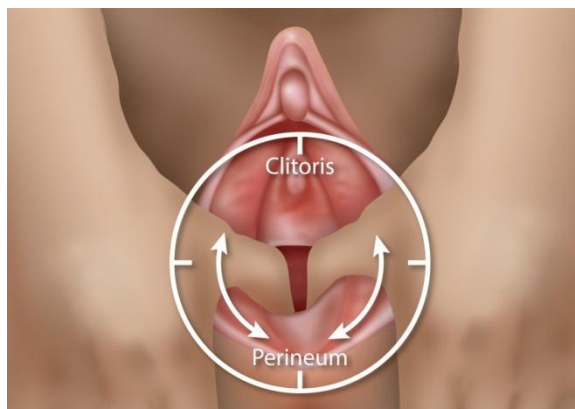
Remember to stop at the point where you still feel relaxed and are not pushing into pain. A tolerable level of discomfort is fine, as long as you can stay relaxed with it. You may only be on step 1 for a while, this is normal. Alternatively, you may also find you can skip some points if they feel easy 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) around. If you find tender, sensitive or tight spots spend a little time working into those areas. Push into a tolerable discomfort, this might be very light initially. You may have several spots to treat
4. Hold the pressure steady at one point with your thumb(s) or finger(s) for about 1-2 minutes. If any 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 muscle stretch at crowning



6. You can also massage the skin of the perineum between the thumb and forefingers
7. As you massage, pull gently outwards (forward) on the lower part of the vagina with your thumbs hooked inside.
8. Gradually over the days/weeks you should be able to increase the pressure you apply
9. Ideally you can perform this massage 3-4 times a week for the last 4-5 weeks of pregnancy
10. Any issues stop and speak with your physiotherapist or midwife.

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 in Pregnancy