

PERINEAL MASSAGE

The perineum is the skin between the vagina and the anus, which thins out and stretches over the baby's presenting part (usually the head) as it is born.

Perineal Massage

Prenatal perineal massage is a technique that assists to slowly and gently stretch the skin and tissues around the vagina and perineum. Massage may help reduce both the risk of tearing during birth and the need for an episiotomy (or 'stitches')

Perineal massage may help prepare you for the feeling of pressure and stretching that comes as your baby's head is born. Knowing what some of the sensations will be like can help you relax and give birth instead of tensing up and fighting the sensations such as stinging, tingling, or burning that you may feel as your baby's head is born. Perineal massage can also encourage you to relax when you have a vaginal examination.

It is also helpful to learn about relaxation techniques, your anatomy and what will happen during labour and birth. Childbirth preparation classes can help you become more aware of your body and how you can help yourself during birth. It is important to note that the benefits of perineal massage are unproven at this stage. However, some women firmly believe in its benefits. If you make the choice to massage your perineum the following directions will ensure you do it correctly.

- 1 *Wash your hands*
- 2 *Find a private, comfortable place and sit or lean back in a comfortable position.*
- 3 *Put a lubricant such as K-Y Personal Lubricant on your thumbs and around the perineum. You can also use your body's own natural lubricant.*
- 4 *Place your thumbs about 3-4cms inside your vagina. Press downwards and to the sides at the same time. Gently and firmly keep stretching until you feel a slight burning, tingling or burning sensation.*
- 5 *Hold the pressure steady at that point with your thumbs for about 2 minutes until the area becomes a little numb and you don't feel it tingling as much.*
- 6 *Keep pressing with your thumbs. Slowly and gently massage back and forth over the lower half of your vagina, working the lubricant into the tissues. Keep this up for 3-4 minutes. Remember to avoid the urinary opening to prevent urinary tract infection.*
- 7 *As you massage, pull gently outwards (forwards) on the lower part of the vagina with your thumbs hooked inside. This helps stretch the skin as the baby's head will stretch it during birth.*

