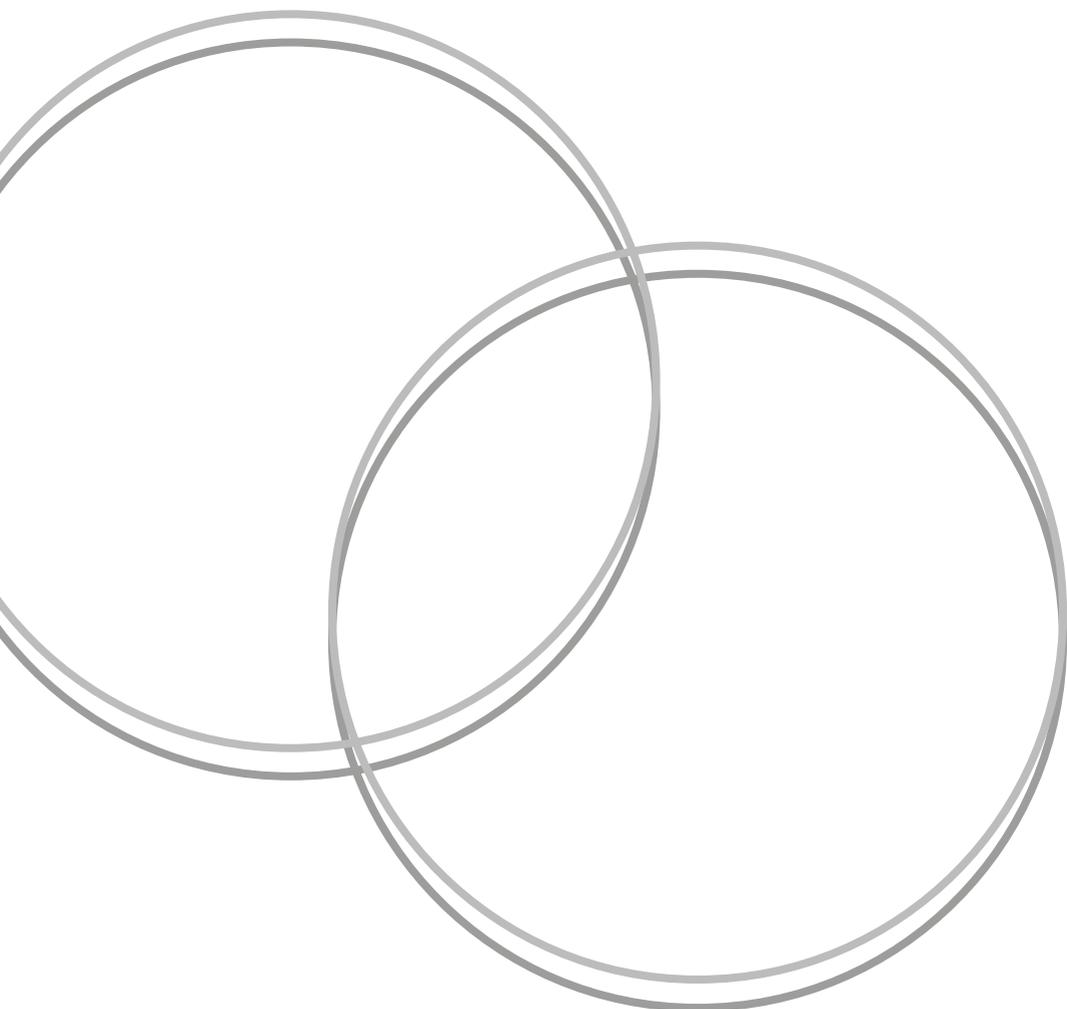




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Antenatal Perineal Massage

Information leaflet



Approximately 85% of women and birthing people will have some degree of perineal tear (a tear in the area between the vagina and the anus) during vaginal birth.

You can help to reduce the chance of a tear or an episiotomy (a cut to the area between the vagina and anus) by performing perineal massage from 34 weeks of pregnancy. This leaflet explains how to perform perineal massage.

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

The perineum is the area of skin and muscle between your vagina and anus (the opening to your back passage). Within the perineum is the pelvic floor, which is a hammock of muscles that supports your pelvic organs, such as your uterus, bladder and bowels.

## **What is perineal massage?**

Perineal massage is a way of preparing your perineum for childbirth. During birth, the perineal skin and muscle needs to stretch to accommodate the birth of the baby.

### **Advantages of perineal massage:**

- 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 and you are less likely to need an episiotomy. An episiotomy is a cut to the perineum that is sometimes performed to speed up the birth of your baby or to try to prevent a deeper more extensive tear.
- It can be particularly helpful if you have previous scar tissue or a more muscular perineum (for example if you play sports that develop more muscle tone in this area – like horse riding/long distance cycling).

## **When should I start and how do I do it?**

You can start at any time from 34 weeks of pregnancy.

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

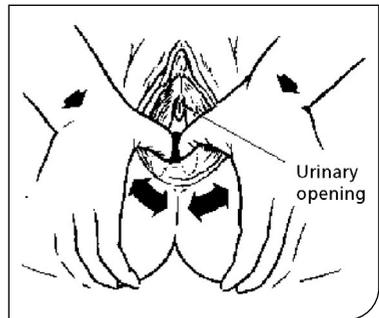
## When should I do it?

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

We suggest using a small amount of unscented oil, for example, olive, sunflower or grape seed oil, to lubricate the area and make the massage more comfortable. You can also use an unscented vaginal lubricant. We advise against using synthetic oils such as baby oil or petroleum gel. Make sure your hands are clean before you start.

### Technique

- Find a comfortable and relaxed in a place where you feel you will not be interrupted.
- You can try lying on a bed or sitting on the toilet.
- You might find it easier to use a mirror for the first few tries, to help you see what you are doing.
- Place your thumbs into your vagina and press downwards towards your anus and out towards the sides of your vagina. You may feel a stinging stretching sensation. Hold this stretch for about a minute. Then massage your thumbs upwards and sideways, then back again in a U-shaped movement. You could practice your slow deep breathing technique while you do this.
- Perineal massage should be comfortable, but you will also feel a stretching sensation. This shouldn't hurt.
- Repeat as often as you wish. For most benefit, aim for a massage every day or every other day.



**Do not do perineal massage if you have:**

- vaginal herpes
- thrush or any other vaginal infection.

**If you need further information about or support with perineal massage please talk to your midwife.**

# Notes



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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