

# Prenatal Perineal Massage

Perineal massage will help you prepare for the stretching and pressure you will feel as the birth canal opens and your baby's head crowns. Learning to relax as you feel the stretching will help you to release when you feel that burning sensation during the birth. Prenatal massage may help the tissues to stretch during birth so that an episiotomy won't be needed. The purpose is not to enlarge the opening.

According to current research, first-time mothers who do prenatal perineal massage are less likely to need episiotomies during childbirth and are less likely to experience tears which need repair (stitches).

Begin perineal massage about six weeks before your due date. Do it once a day for about five minutes. Do not do the massage if you have active genital herpes or any other genital infection. Always use clean hands with very short fingernails, and avoid touching the opening of the urinary tract.

To learn the process, it may be helpful first to prop a mirror so you can see your vagina and perineum. You can see and feel the perineum move as you do the Kegel exercise. Practice relaxing the muscles with a warm washcloth held on the perineum. You may prefer to take a warm bath to help relax before doing the massage. A lubricant may help to soften the massaging fingers or thumbs, and to increase the elasticity of the perineum. You may use cocoa butter, K-Y jelly, wheat germ oil, or even vegetable or olive oil from the pantry.

Place either your thumbs or index fingers an inch or two inside your vagina and press downward toward the rectum. As you press, you will feel a slight burning, stretching sensation. At that point, hold the pressure for one or two minutes until the stinging subsides. Slowly move your fingers or thumbs up along the lower sides of the vagina with the same steady pressure. Massage back to center and up the sides, pulling slightly forward, for three or four minutes. This will work the lubricant into the tissues. Practice releasing the perineum to the sensation of the stretch, as you will do at your baby's birth. In a week you should notice that the tissue stretches much easier as you massage. Do the Kegel exercises to help increase the muscle tone of the pelvic floor.

## Directions for doing prenatal perineal massage

1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
2. Lean back in a comfortable semi-sitting position, with pillows supporting your back and knees.
3. Put a lubricant on your fingers and perineum.
4. Massage, firmly but gently, relaxing your muscles as you feel the pressure or stinging.
5. If you prefer to have the massage done for you, tell your partner how much pressure to apply.

Reference: Beckman, M.M., & Stock, O.M. (2013). Antenatal perineal massage for reducing perineal trauma. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*.