

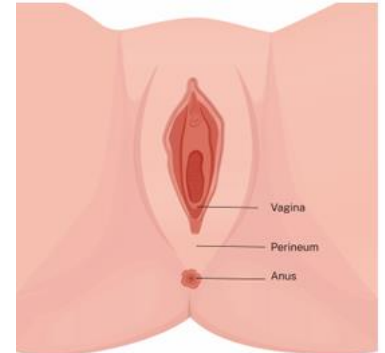
Your Perineum and having a baby

Patient Information Sheet

What is the perineum?

The perineum is the small area of skin and muscle between your vagina (birth canal) and your anus (back passage).

It helps support the organs in your pelvis and can stretch during childbirth.



What is a perineal injury?

A perineal injury is a tear or cut in the skin and muscle between the vagina and the anus. This can happen during childbirth.

Sometimes the perineum tears on its own. Other times, a doctor or midwife may make a cut with scissors called an episiotomy to help the baby come out.

Perineal tears are grouped into 4 stages, from 1st to 4th, depending on how deep the tear is and which tissues are affected.

How common is Perineal injury?

Perineal injuries are very common during childbirth. Only about 1 in 10 women give birth without any tearing at all, so it's something many people experience.

If you have had a vaginal birth before, your chance of having a tear is usually lower. The more serious tears, called 3rd- and 4th-degree tears, are not common. Most tears are small and heal well with the right care.

What is an episiotomy?

An episiotomy is a cut made with scissors in the perineum as your baby is being born. You will be given an injection to numb the area, so you do not feel pain from the cut.

An episiotomy may be advised if:

- your baby needs help to be born, such as with forceps
- your baby is distressed, and being born more quickly will help
- your baby's shoulders get stuck during birth

Your healthcare provider will ask for your consent before doing an episiotomy.

Will you need stitches?

Not all tears need stitches to heal well, so it will depend on how deep and which area is affected. If stitches are needed, you will be given a local anaesthetic (an injection to numb the area) so you don't feel pain during the repair.

The stitches dissolve on their own, so they do not need to be taken out. You might notice some of the stitches coming away as you heal — this is normal. Most tears or cuts heal within a few weeks.

If you have a 3rd- or 4th-degree tear, the repair is usually done in an operating room. If you would like more information about these types of tears just ask your health care provider.



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Types of tears	
1 st degree	Shallow tear to the perineal skin
2 nd degree	Tear to the skin and muscles of perineum
3 rd degree	Injury to skin, perineal muscles and the ring-shaped muscle that surrounds the anus (the anal sphincter)
4 th degree	Injury to the skin, perineal muscles and extends through anal sphincter and into the anus
Episiotomy	A cut made with scissors to the perineal area to enlarge the vagina during childbirth

Stitches?
sometimes
often recommended
recommended
recommended
recommended



Queensland clinical guidelines-Consumer information: Your perineum and having a baby

How to reduce the severity of Perineal tears before labour

Pelvic floor muscle training and perineal massage can both help during pregnancy. Doing both is more helpful than doing only one. You can talk with your midwife or health care provider about how to do them, and you may learn more at antenatal classes.

Pelvic floor muscle training

- Keep your tummy relaxed and breathe normally
- Lift, squeeze and hold the muscles inside your pelvis for a few seconds (as if stopping the flow of urine or holding in wind), then relax fully. Repeat up to 10 times in a row.
- Do them in any position — lying down, sitting or standing
- Practice every day — using reminders like washing your hands or brushing your teeth
- Activate your pelvic floor when you cough, sneeze or lift

Perineal massage

Massage of the perineum can help prepare the area for birth, especially if this your first vaginal birth. Not everyone feels comfortable doing it, and that's ok. Only do what feels right for you.

How to do perineal massage

- Ensure your hands are washed and that you have a comfortable private place to sit in.
- Apply lubricant to your thumbs and on the perineum.
- Place your thumbs 3 - 4 cm into the vagina – you may like to have mirror positioned so that you can see this clearly.
- Press downwards and sideways at the same time so that your vagina is stretched into a U shape. Gently and firmly keep stretching and holding until you feel a tingling sensation – this should not be painful.

How to do a perineal massage

- 1 Gently insert your thumbs or 1-2 fingers
- 2 Gently push downwards (towards your anus)
- 3 Then to the sides of your vagina

Hold the stretch for up to 2 minutes and release.
A perineal massage should not last longer than 5 minutes.

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Recovering after birth

Your body needs time to heal after giving birth. These tips can help you feel more comfortable and support your recovery.

Rest and Gentle movement

- Lie on your side when you can- it helps take pressure off your perineum
- Support your perineum with your hand or a pad when you cough or sneeze
- Avoid sit-ups, heavy lifting, or high-impact exercise for the first 6 weeks or until healed
- Start gentle pelvic floor exercises to help your muscles recover

Pain relief

- Use an ice pack (wrapped in a cloth or in a pad) on your perineum for 10- 15 minutes every 2 hours to assist with reducing swelling
- Take pain relief like paracetamol or ibuprofen if needed

Preventing infection

- Keep the area clean and dry
- Change your pad every 2-3 hours or when it feels wet
- Shower at least once a day
- Wipe from front to back with soft toilet paper
- Pat dry gently-dont rub
- Avoid soaps, powders, creams or sprays while healing
- Use maternity pads, not tampons
- Wear supportive, breathable underwear

Going to the toilet

- Drink at least 2 litres of water each day
- Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre-rich foods
- If your stools (bowel movements) are hard, ask your healthcare provider about a stool softener
- If it stings when you pass urine, use a spray bottle or pour water over your perineum while urinating

Sex after birth

- Only when you feel ready
- It is recommended to wait until 6 weeks post birth or until your body has healed
- Talk with your partner and healthcare provider about what is right for you



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When to seek help

Most people heal well after birth, but it's important to get help if something doesn't feel right. Contact your healthcare provider if you notice any of the following:

- Increasing pain that doesn't improve, or pain that suddenly gets worse
- Redness, swelling, or a bad smell around your stitches or perineal area
- Fever, chills or feeling unwell
- Heavy bleeding (soaking a pad in an hour or passing large clots)
- Difficulty passing urine or poo
- Stinging or burning that doesn't get better when you pass urine
- Your stitches open or you see a gap in the wound
- Any concerns about healing or something just feels "not right"

Your midwife, doctor or local health service can check your healing and give you advice

For more information:

Women's Outpatient Department
Women's and Children's Hospital
72 King William Rd, North Adelaide SA 5006
Telephone (08) 8161 7000
www.wch.sa.gov.au

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