

Pelvic Health Physiotherapy

Antenatal Perineal Massage

What is perineal massage?

Perineal massage is a stretching of perineal tissue in preparation for birth. The perineum is the area between the vagina and the anus (back passage). As your baby moves through the birth canal this area needs to be able to stretch and relax. Perineal massage can be performed by you and / or your partner.

Why do I need to prepare the perineum?

It aims to increase flexibility of the perineal tissue in this area. It also teaches you to relax your pelvic floor muscles when there is a sensation of stretching (when your baby's head "crowns").

Research has shown that massage is effective in reducing the likelihood of episiotomies and tears needing stitches (research shows this in 1st time mothers). Massage can help to desensitise the perineum, which means that it can reduce the amount of pain in that area (research shows this in women who have had more than one child). Therefore, it may be helpful to use perineal massage prior to both your first and subsequent deliveries.

When wouldn't you use perineal massage?

If you have a vaginal, urine or genital infection such as thrush, urine infection or genital herpes or have been advised by your obstetric team.

When should I use perineal massage?

We know from research that you can achieve the best results by massaging regularly:

- from around 35 weeks of pregnancy
- repeat daily or when possible
- massage for 2-3 minutes. Repeat this 2-3 times daily

How do I massage the area?

Prepare:

Either you or your partner can perform the massage. A mirror can help you to locate the area between the vagina and the anus so you know what you are doing.

- Hands should be clean with nails clipped
- Make sure your bladder is empty
- Some women find having a warm bath beforehand can help relax and soften the tissue

Position:

Get into a comfortable and relaxed position. The best place to perform this massage is in bed. Prop yourself up with pillows to support your back and bend your knees.

You could also try:

- squatting down (supporting yourself by leaning back against a wall or forwards on a bed / chair)
- sitting on the toilet
- standing with one foot raised on a chair / toilet
- leaning back or kneeling on all fours

Technique:

Hold your thumbs in the position shown for about 1 minute (see diagram)

Press down towards the anus and to the sides of the vagina walls. Hold your thumbs in this position for about 1 minute. You will begin to feel a stretching sensation. Breathe deeply

Gently massage the lower half of your vagina using a U-shaped movement for 2-3 minutes. Repeat this 2-3 times with each session. It may take a couple of weeks of daily massage before you notice more elasticity in your perineal area. **Over time you should aim to build up the intensity and duration of the stretch.**



Mum and Baby app

You can find helpful videos on perineal massage and other pre and post-natal information via the Mum and Baby app or myhealthlondon website page.

Topics include:

- pelvic floor muscle exercises
- posture and positioning during pregnancy and following birth
- looking after your bladder
- constipation during and after pregnancy

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net**. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to:
Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street,
London W2 1NY.
Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**
Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

imperial.patient.information@nhs.net

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We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK_FREE or WiFiSPARK_PREMIUM