

Date Created: September 16, 2004

Date Revised: January 7, 2005

Perineal Massage

Massaging the perineum (tissues surrounding the vaginal opening) daily for the last 6 weeks of pregnancy may help avoid the need for an episiotomy and/or prevent tearing by reducing resistance in the vaginal and perineal tissues. In addition, strengthening and learning to relax the pelvic floor muscles by practicing Kegel exercise is beneficial.

1. The massage should be done daily for 5-10 minutes beginning 6 weeks before you are due.
2. Wash your hands before beginning, if not massaging in the bath.
3. You can do the massage yourself, using your thumbs, but it is probably easier for your partner to do this with you. Make sure that your bladder is empty and that you are propped and comfortable. When first starting, you might find that a warm bath softens your tissues. Using a mirror the first few times will help you become familiar with the area.
4. Massage a natural oil (wheat germ, olive or canola) into the tissues of the perineum and the lower vaginal wall. If you have any scar tissues from previous episiotomies or tears, massage it more.
5. Have your partner put both index fingers (or you put your thumbs) about 2 inches into the vagina and press downward toward the rectum. While maintaining steady pressure, the fingers should be moved upward along the sides of the vagina in a rhythmic "U" or "sling" type movement. Be sure to avoid the urinary opening.
6. As you massage each night, your tissues should relax and stretch. Gently stretch the vaginal opening as wide as possible each time until you feel a tingling or burning sensation.
7. Hold this stretch, without hurting, for 30-60 seconds and then release. Massage with more oil if needed, stretch again to the maximum hold, then release. In the beginning you will feel tight, but with time and practice the tissues will relax and stretch.
8. Do a Kegel exercise and feel how strong the muscle is. Feel how difficult the stretching is when you are tensing the muscles of the pelvic floor. Consciously release them as you do the massage. Remember to do Kegel exercises before and after the baby is born to improve muscle tone and strength.
9. This massage should not be painful. If you have any problems, consult your midwife.