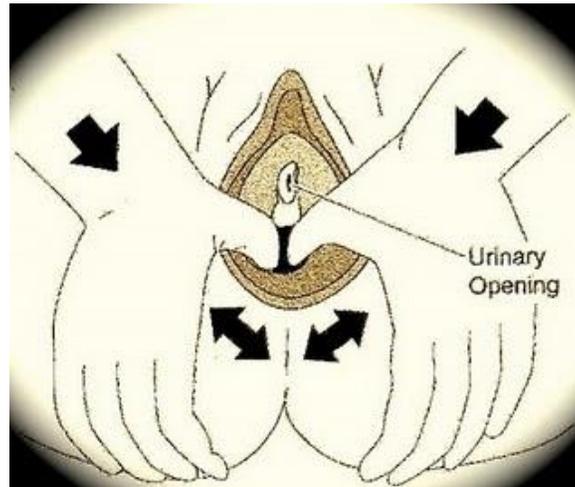


## PERINEAL MASSAGE

Massaging the perineum (i.e. the area between the vagina and anus) during the last few weeks of pregnancy, from 34 weeks on, helps to stretch the outlet and prepare the lower birth canal for delivery. Essentially perineal massage doesn't train your muscles to 'do' anything – but it gets you used to the stretching sensation as your baby's head gently emerges. Think of that sensation as feedback to you to NOT do any coached pushing at that time. At this point you want to focus on relaxing and breathing your baby out. Bear down only when your body is bearing down to avoid injury to the perineum, bladder and pelvic floor. Avoid holding your breath during birth so you're not restricting oxygen to your baby.



Perineal massage should be comfortable but give a feeling of stretching similar to that which will be experienced when the baby's head presses against the pelvic floor. A non-irritant lubricant is necessary like coconut oil is best for this massage.

To perform this exercise, put your thumbs 2-4 cm into the vagina and press down towards the rectum; maintain this steady pressure as you move your thumbs upwards along the sides of the vagina in a rhythmic 'U' or 'sling' type movement, as indicated in the figure. (Note that you should avoid the urinary opening). Yes it can be tricky – but with a bit of practice (or if you can involve your partner) it'll make things a bit easier. It's also in his best interest that you don't need stitches after birth either ;)

Try to let the perineum relax as you are performing the massage. Continue the massage for up to five minutes at a time and repeat it on alternative days. Follow the massage with five strong contractions of your pelvic floor muscles. These are the muscles that you use to hold-on when you want to go to the toilet but have to wait. By massaging and exercising this area you will become more aware of the pressure sensation that you will feel during delivery. By relaxing as much as possible during the period of stretching, you are preparing yourself to 'let go' when baby's head emerges. And by contracting the pelvic floor muscles, you maintain muscle strength and become familiar with the different sensations of tightness and relaxation in this.

**“Perineal massage stretches the vaginal tissue, the muscles surrounding the vagina, and the skin of the perineum. After doing the massage three or four days in a row, you will probably find that the mother clearly tolerates the stretching better than at first, and that you have to increase the pressure to cause stinging. This is a good sign. The mother will still feel a stinging sensation as the baby's head is being born, but by then she will know how to relax despite the stinging.”**

**--Excerpt from THE BIRTH PARTNER by Penny Simkin**

## PERSONAL PERINEAL MASSAGE

- First off, make sure you are in a private comfortable place where you can relax. It's best to do this following a warm bath, or at least a hot shower or after using a warm compress on the perineum. This massage will become easier the more you practice.
- Scrub your hands and trim your thumb nails. Sit in a warm comfortable area, spreading your legs apart in a semi-sitting birthing position. To become familiar with your perineal area, use a mirror for the first few massages. Use massage oil, such as coconut oil, or a water-soluble lubricant, such as K-Y Jelly (not a petroleum-based oil) on your fingers and thumbs and around your perineum.
- Insert your thumbs as deeply as you can inside your vagina and spread your legs. Press the perineal area down toward the rectum and toward the sides. Gently continue to stretch this opening until you feel a slight burn or tingling.
- Hold this stretch until the tingling subsides and gently massage the lower part of the vaginal canal back and forth.
- While massaging, hook your thumbs onto the sides of the vaginal canal and gently pull these tissues forward, as your baby's head will do during delivery.
- Finally, massage the tissues between the thumb and forefinger back and forth for about a minute.
- Being too vigorous could cause bruising or swelling in these sensitive tissues. During the massage avoid pressure on the urethra as this could induce irritation or infection.
- As you become adept with this procedure, add Kegel exercises to your routine to help you get the feel for your pelvic muscles. Do this ritual daily beginning around week 34 of pregnancy.
- As your bump grows and it's harder to reach you can stand up – put your foot up on a low stool or step and reach around to your perineal area from the back

## MORE TIPS

- Visualize warm oil pouring over your perineum – relaxing the muscles even more.
- If at all possible spend some time laboring in water – live in the bath!! Studies have shown that you're less likely to experience perineal injury if you labor and/or birth in warm water.
- Have your partner apply a wet, warm compress to the perineal area when you are bearing down – it'll give you something to focus on and will encourage the tissues to stretch and expand.
- **Caution: If vaginitis, a herpes sore, or another vaginal problem exists, perineal massage could worsen or spread the condition and should not be done until the problem goes away.**



## PERINEAL MASSAGE FOR THE PARTNER TO DO

### Instructions for your partner:

- Be sure your fingernails are short. Wash your hands before beginning. If you have rough skin on your fingers that might scratch her, wear disposable rubber gloves.
- Have the mother make herself comfortable in a semi-sitting position, with her legs bent and relaxed. After a warm bath is ideal. If Mom is using a relaxation CD this is a great time to listen to the CD so Mom can completely relax.
- Lubricate your fingers well with coconut oil or with water-soluble jelly. Do not use baby oil, mineral oil, or petroleum jelly, as they tend to dry the tissue. **To avoid contaminating the oil, do not dip your fingers in it; instead, squirt the oil over your fingers.**
- Use your index fingers. Start with one and progress to two. Place your fingers well inside the mother's vagina (up to the second knuckle); rotate them in opposite directions upward along the sides and back to the center while pulling outward gently.
- Tell the mom to concentrate on relaxing her perineum as she feels the pressure. As she becomes more comfortable with the massage, increase the pressure just enough to make the perineum begin to sting from the stretching. Encourage mom to breathe through the sensation - keeping her body relaxed.
- Continue the massage for about 3 minutes. In the beginning the tissue will feel tight, but with time and repeated massages it will relax and stretch.
- Ask your caregiver to answer any questions you may have after trying the massage.

