

Perineal Massage

Perineal massage is a controversial issue. It is one of the oldest and surest ways of improving the health, blood flow, elasticity, and relaxation of the pelvic floor muscles and, if practiced in late pregnancy, this technique improves the chances of birthing your baby without an episiotomy. However, if done too vigorously, it can cause swelling of the perineum, which will hinder its ability to stretch. Perineal Massage can be a fun activity for you and your partner/husband! 😊 In fact, it is most easily and more beneficially accomplished with someone else performing it. If mom is performing the massage alone, the thumbs will be the easiest to use. Before you begin your perineal massage, please read the following and decide for yourself if you wish to proceed:

Many studies show that prenatal perineal massage protects against perineal trauma in first-time mothers. No benefits were found in women who had already given birth at least once.

Other studies show no benefits of perineal massage in any mothers.

The results of a homebirth study associated perineal massage during labor with higher rates of damage. It is well-known that swollen tissue during delivery [which can be caused by perineal massage during labor] increases the likelihood of tearing.

One midwife encourages her clients to use prenatal perineal massage to help get the mother and her support person attuned to the perineum. Relaxation under pressure is one of the perceived benefits of prenatal perineal massage. It can convey a certain awareness of the perineal area that may help during delivery.

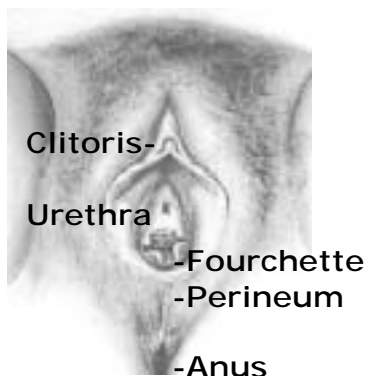
— Excerpted from "Everything You Need to Know to Prevent Perineal Tearing," by Elizabeth Bruce, *Midwifery Today* Issue 65. The remainder of the article will be excerpted in *E-News* Issue 5:25



1. Be sure that fingernails are smooth and short, and that hands are washed well.
2. Get into a comfortable position for the massage: semi-sitting, squatting against a wall or standing with one foot raised and resting on tub, toilet or chair. Some women prefer to have the massage performed on them while lying in bed, try different positions to find what works best for you.
3. Lubricate your index, second finger and thumb with enough oil or jelly to allow your fingers to move smoothly, using any of the following: Vitamin E - Wheat Germ Oil - Mineral Oil - Virgin Olive Oil – Almond Oil - Lubricating Gel (such as KY). Pouring, rather than dipping, the oil over the fingers reduces risk of contamination. **DO NOT** use baby oil, petroleum jelly, hand lotion, or perfumed oils as these are believed to be less well absorbed by the body than are vegetable or water-based products, and could give an allergic reaction. Beginning two weeks before your EDD, you can use

Evening Primrose Oil, with permission of your caregiver. EPO can help to ripen the cervix, so do not use before the pregnancy is term (37+ weeks).

4. First massage diagonally on either side of the top of the Vestibule, just below the Urethra. Concentrate on relaxing the muscles of the vagina, and upon the feeling of openness. This helps to better prepare you for the sensations of childbirth.
5. Then, insert the fingers into the vagina approximately 1-2" or no farther than your first knuckle of your index finger. As you maintain steady, but **gentle** pressure, press downward on the area between the vagina and the rectum and upward along the sides of the vagina in a "U" sling-type motion. This pressure will stretch the vaginal tissue, the muscles surrounding the vagina, and the outer rim of the perineum. Be sure to gently stretch the inner portions as well as the outer rim by the perineum. If it hurts, you're doing it too hard. You should however, feel some pressure and uncomfortable stretching/burning. If it is not uncomfortable to some extent, you are not doing it properly. The idea behind perineal massage is to get used to the burning sensation that occurs when the fetal head presses against the perineum.



6. Then, start at the FOURCHETTE edge of the perineum and massage the outer layer of the perineum, traveling towards the anus. Once at the anus, the massage pattern is complete. Take precaution to **not** bring bacteria from the rectum into the vaginal cavity.

7. A perineal massage should take at least five minutes, longer if you and the baby's father are enjoying it. ☺ The vaginal and perineal sensations will be of tightness at first, but as the weeks progress, daily massage will relax and stretch the tissue.