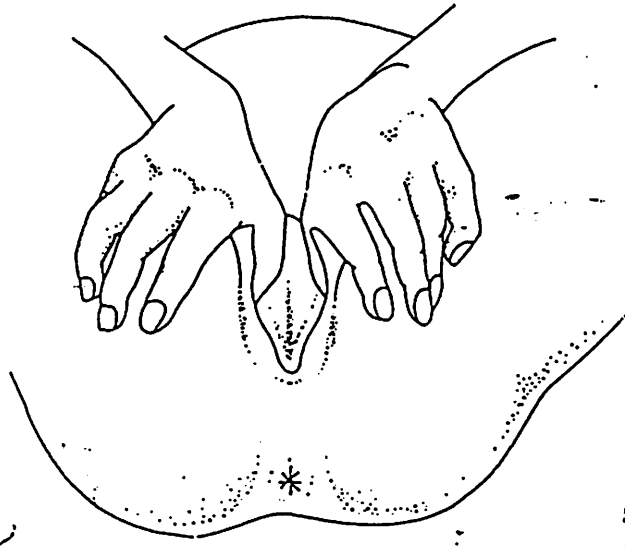


PERINEAL MASSAGE

Perineal massage during the last six weeks of pregnancy will help prepare the tissues in the perineal area for the birth. As the baby's head emerges during the second stage stretching sensations occur. Massaging the perineum can help you to become accustomed to these sensations and desensitize that area to the sensations of touch, pressure and stretch. Perineal massage may reduce the risk of a tear or the need for stitches.

This massage can be done by you or your partner. Wash your hands before you start. A mirror may be necessary the first few times, to help locate the vaginal opening and the perineum (the tissue between the vagina and the anus). Make yourself comfortable either sitting on a chair or bed with knees bent up or standing with one leg resting on a chair. A warm bath prior to the massage may help to relax the perineum. Use a lubricant such as KY Jelly, vitamin E oil or pure vegetable oil on your thumbs and around the perineum. You can also use your body's own natural lubrication.



Insert your thumbs, or fingers. Gently press the floor of the vagina down and to the sides. Stretch the lower part of the vaginal opening, pressing down until you are aware of the stretch. You may experience a sensation of slight burning or tingling. Hold the pressure steadily for a few minutes until the area becomes numb and you can't feel the tingling as much. Keep pressing with your thumbs, gently massaging side to side in an arc movement. As you massage, gently pull the perineum down and forward a little as this copies the action of the baby's head at crowning.

- ◆ do this massage once a day, starting at around the thirty-fourth week of pregnancy. After about a week you should notice an increase in flexibility and stretchiness. Massage for about three to four minutes per day.
- ◆ partners may massage for you - it will be easier for them to use their index and middle fingers. They should listen to you - massage firmly but gently - let them know how much pressure to apply
- ◆ if you have had an episiotomy (stitches) with a previous birth, concentrate part of your massage on that area. Scar tissue isn't as stretchy as the rest of your perineum and needs extra attention
- ◆ after about one week you may notice an increase in flexibility and stretchiness

CAUTIONS

- Avoid the urinary opening to prevent increasing the chance of urinary tract infections.
- Perineal massage should not be used by women who have a history of active herpes or other vaginal or perineal lesions as you could spread the infection.

This massage, together with pelvic floor exercises, is a good way to get to know your pelvic floor. An increased awareness of this area will help you to relax rather than tense the pelvic floor muscles during delivery. Discuss perineal massage with your doctor. It is also important that the midwife at delivery is aware that you have been stretching the perineum in an effort to avoid an episiotomy.

Remember - even an enthusiastic perineal massage program does not guarantee delivery without episiotomy.