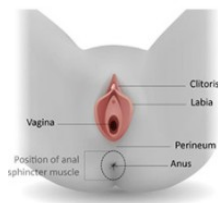


HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR PERINEUM AFTER HAVING A BABY



9/10 first time mothers have some degree of perineal trauma which can range from bruising, to an uncomplicated first or second degree tear to a more complicated third or fourth degree tear or episiotomy. Whether you have stitches or not, it is important that you follow this advice to help you heal as quickly as possible.

What is a perineal tear?



The perineum is the area between the vagina and the anus (back passage).

Tears in this area are classified as follows:

- First degree tears – small, skin-only tears which mostly heal naturally, though some may require stitches.
- Second degree tears – deeper tears affecting the muscle of the perineum as well as the skin. Second degree tears need to be stitched. First and second degree tears do not usually cause any long-term problems.
- Third or fourth degree tears – these involve the muscles of the back passage (anus), and need an operation to repair them. There is a separate leaflet for this.
 - An episiotomy, a cut to widen the opening of the vagina, causes similar damage to second degree tear.

When will my stitches be removed?

The stitches for all perineal tears or an episiotomy are dissolvable and so do not need to be removed. Generally stitches have dissolved after 4 weeks but occasionally some will remain for up to 6 weeks.

How can I help my perineum heal?

- Avoid prolonged sitting or standing and be sure to use appropriate maternity sanitary pads, which will be softer and prevent friction on perineal wounds.
- Make sure you change your sanitary towel regularly - at least each time you visit the toilet.
- Always wash your hands before and after changing your pad.

Patient Information Leaflet for: How to Look After Your Perineum After Having a Baby

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Approved by: PIF

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- Ideally clean your perineum with lukewarm water **each time you use the toilet** for the first 1-2 weeks. You can use a jug to pour warm water over your perineum while you sit on the toilet. Some women prefer to use the shower attachment or a bidet.
- Dry the area carefully using a clean dry towel or wipe.
- When wiping your bottom make sure you wipe away from your perineum i.e. from front to back.
- Avoid wearing tight trousers, jeans or tights as these may rub.
- Gentle pelvic floor exercises which help strengthen the muscles around your vagina and anus, and also help the blood supply to promote healing, should be commenced as soon as you feel able. If you are unsure how to perform these ask your midwife or refer to the patient information leaflet [Looking After Your Bladder, Bowel and Pelvic Floor When You Have A Baby](#)

What pain killers may I take?

Regular pain killers such as paracetamol (which is safe when breastfeeding) ensure you remain comfortable and mobile. Ibuprofen (if not contraindicated) can also be used. – Always follow advice re dosage and frequency as instructed on the package. If this is not enough please ask for midwife or GP for further advice.

Ice packs can also help reduce swelling and discomfort. Make a simple ice pack at home by dampening a clean sanitary towel with water, placing it in a polythene bag and freezing it. To use, wrap in a clean wet flannel and place on your perineum for 5 minutes. Caution: ice can burn so do not use it for more than 5 minutes. Do not sit on top of an ice pack.

What can I do if I am constipated?

It is a common to worry about having your bowels open having had stitches - some women find it helpful to support the perineum with a clean pad - this also protects your stitches. A healthy diet with plenty of fluids, vegetables and fruit rich in vitamin C, may help prevent constipation and also support wound healing. If you need laxatives then seek advice from your local pharmacist or GP.

Can I bath or shower?

- You can use a shower or bath to wash as usual but avoid using perfumed soaps.
- There is no evidence to suggest adding anything to your bath will help your perineum heal more quickly.

When can I have sex?

There are no rules about having sex but it is best to wait to have sexual intercourse until the tear has healed and bleeding has stopped. Some women find that they need to use a vaginal lubricant to make sex more comfortable. Make sure that you have thought about contraception before you begin to have sex again. Please take a look at the leaflet [Your Guide to Post -natal contraception](#)

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How will I know if I am healing?

Your midwife will ask you at each contact if you have any concerns about your perineum e.g. pain/ swelling /bruising. If you have any concerns they will offer to examine you to check your perineum is healing.

Most women recover quickly from a perineal tear. However, you should contact your midwife (up to 28 days following birth) via Medicom 01603 481222 or your own GP if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Increased or persistent pain.
- Redness or increased swelling around the perineal area.
- An offensive smell or discharge.
- Feeling feverish.
- Problems with passing urine.
- Incontinence (leaking from bladder or bowel).

If you are experiencing pain and tightness from your perineum after three weeks you can self-refer to women's health physiotherapy to help you manage this: Pelvic and Maternal Health Physiotherapy Telephone 01603 287130 (24 hour answer phone)

For more information take a look at Tommy's pregnancy hub/After birth/Your body after the birth/recovery from a perineal tear



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