

Perineal Massage

- Massaging your perineum from approximately 34 weeks may reduce the chance that you tear this area during birth and can help with your recovery after the birth.
- During birth, the perineal tissue needs to relax and open to allow your baby to pass through your vagina.

What is the perineum and pelvic floor?

- The perineum is the area of tissue between your vagina and anus. It connects with the muscles of the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor is a “hammock” of muscles which supports your pelvic organs, such as your bladder and bowels.

What happens to the pelvic floor during childbirth?

- Most women will have some degree of perineal tear during vaginal birth, and most will fully recover
- Stretching or tearing of the perineum during childbirth can affect the support that your pelvic floor gives you. This can sometimes lead to troubles with bladder or bowel control and comfort during sex. It can also lead to prolapse (or dropping down) of your uterus.

What are the advantages of perineal massage?

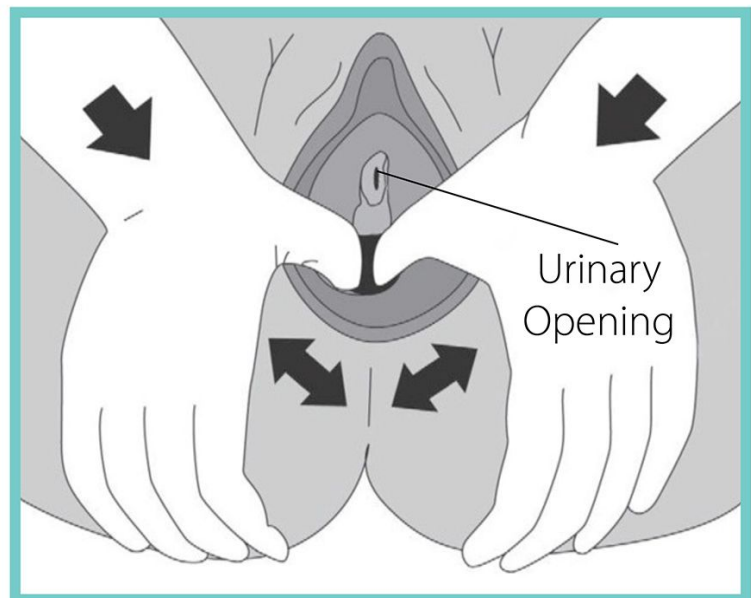
- It improves the perineum’s blood flow and ability to stretch more easily and less painfully during the birth of your baby.
- Tears in the perineum may be less likely.
- It helps you learn the feeling of letting your perineum relax and open up.
- Your perineum may be less likely to be painful after the birth of your baby.

What do I need to do Perineal Massage?

- A good time is during or after a bath or shower because blood vessels in the area are dilated so the perineum is softer and more comfortable to touch.
- Perineal massage can be done by you or your partner, if you are comfortable with this.
- Make sure your hands are clean.
- Use small amount of unscented oil such as olive, sunflower or grape seed oil, to lubricate the area. You can also use an unscented personal lubricant, such as K-Y Jelly.
- Don’t use synthetic oils such as baby oil or petroleum jelly (Vaseline).
- Comfortable positions include:
 - Propped up with pillows on a bed or sofa with your knees bent out and supported.
 - Resting back in the bath with one leg up on the side. Then change legs.
 - Standing under a warm shower with one leg up on a stool. Then change legs.
 - Sitting on the toilet.

How do I do Perineal Massage?

- Get comfortable and relaxed in a place where you feel safe and will not be interrupted.
- You might find it easier to use a mirror for the first few tries.
- Place one or both thumbs on the back wall of your vagina, just inside, resting your fingers on your buttocks. You may prefer to use only one hand at a time.
- Pressing down a little towards your rectum, gently massage by moving your thumb(s) and fingers together upwards and outwards then back again, in a rhythmic 'U' shaped movement.
- You are aiming to massage the area inside your vagina, rather than the skin on the outside. However, you may still feel the stretching sensation on the skin on the outside.
- Perineal massage should be comfortable but you will also feel a stretching feeling. This is similar to how your perineum will open up as you give birth to your baby.
- Focus on relaxing your perineum as much as possible during the massage.
- With time and practice, you will increase your ability to relax and can increase the pressure towards your rectum. Being able to relax through this feeling of increased pressure will help you to relax as you feel the pressure in labour and your baby's head is about to be born.
- The massage can last as long as you wish, but aim for around five minutes at a time
- For most benefit, aim for a massage every day or every other day.



What if I don't feel comfortable with this?

That's OK! It's an optional strategy and we provide this information for our patients who are interested. If you have had negative or traumatic experiences in the past you might feel uncomfortable with perineal massage and birth. We would be very happy to discuss your needs in a safe and supportive environment so that we can help you feel prepared for birth.

Do not do perineal massage if:

- You an outbreak of vaginal herpes, yeast infection or other vaginal infection
- It's painful - try again another day and talk to a Crocus doctor if it remains painful