



Perineal Massage

Perineal massage is a technique used to decrease the possibility of episiotomy or tear. It stretches the perineal tissues to reduce resistance during second stage labor and has been used in traditional societies for centuries. Thoughtful midwives and OBs use the technique during pushing to reduce the risk of tearing. Relaxing the muscles of the pelvic floor also reduces resistance during second stage labor. Doing the massage on one's own helps one to identify the sensation of stretching, and condition oneself to relax at the onset of pressure on the pelvic floor. Massaging oil into the perineum may also soften the tissue and nourish it; thereby increasing its elasticity, and again decreasing the risk of tear or episiotomy.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin by using the bathroom, washing hands, and trimming nails.
2. The massage should be done with any of the following oils:
 - Vitamin E oil
 - Almond oil
 - Wheat germ oil
 - Olive oil
3. Beginning about 4-6 weeks before due date, massage daily for 5-10 minutes at a time. The massage can be done after bathing when the tissues are soft and relaxed. Either the woman or her partner can perform this massage.
4. You may prepare the area by applying a moist warm compress for a few minutes
5. DOING THE MASSAGE YOURSELF – Technique #1

Place one foot on the toilet. Dip your THUMB into the oil. Rub the oil into the perineum and lower vaginal walls. Insert thumb into your vagina to about the first knuckle. Massage in a rhythmic “U” movement. This will stretch the vaginal tissue, the muscles surrounding the vagina and the skin of the perineum. When the tissue is stretched to its maximum, it will burn – that is the “ring of fire” sensation that you are practicing working through or relaxing around. Locate any scar tissue and concentrate a portion of the time massaging this area to soften hardened tissue. Apply more oil as needed. You may want to use a mirror the first couple of times to familiarize yourself with this area. Concentrate and relax throughout the massage, and take deep relaxing breaths.

6. Technique #2

With the oil on your fingers and thumb, pull down (toward anus) until you feel the “ring of fire”. Hold your fingers or thumb there and relax and breathe until the sensation lessens or releases. This should take about 1-2 minutes. Slowly release. Repeat up to 5 times.

7. PARTNER MASSAGE

The pregnant woman makes herself comfortable while lying in a semi-seated position. Her partner should use their index and middle fingers together and follow the massage instructions above, starting with, “Massage in a rhythmic “U” movement.”

As you become familiar with the massage, begin applying more pressure to stretch the tissues. You should feel a burning or stinging sensation while you perform the massage during your last week before delivery. Remember to concentrate, relax and LET GO of the vaginal muscles in practice for delivery. This will help prepare you for the crowning of the baby's head. Don't forget to continue your Kegel exercises and squat as often as you think of it to further prepare your body for birth.

Reference:

- Simkin, P., Whalley, J., & Keppler, A. (2010). *Pregnancy, childbirth, and the newborn: The complete guide* (2nd ed.). Minnetonka, MN: Meadowbrook Press.
- Stillerman, E. (2008). *Prenatal massage: A textbook of pregnancy, labor, and postpartum bodywork*. St. Louis, MO: Mosby/Elsevier.