

Perineal Massage

There are 2 schools of thought surrounding perineal massage. One thought is that it is unnecessary and that only a gentle crowning stage with gentle support will aid in avoiding a tear. The other thought is that it cannot hurt if done gently, and may help. Like so many other issues surrounding pregnancy, birth and parenting, the choice is up to you! If you feel so inclined, here are *instructions for how to do perineal massage.:

1. Scrub your hands and trim your nails. Sit in a warm comfortable area, spreading your legs apart in a semi-sitting birthing position. To become familiar with your perineal area use a mirror for the first few massages (a floor-to-ceiling mirror works best). Use massage oil, such as pure vegetable oil, or a water-soluble lubricant, such as K-Y Jelly (not a petroleum-based oil) on your fingers and thumbs and around your perineum.
2. Insert your thumbs as deeply as you can inside your vagina and spread your legs. Press the perineal area down toward the rectum and toward the sides. Gently continue to stretch this opening until you feel a slight burn or tingling.
3. Hold this stretch until the tingling subsides and gently massage the lower part of the vaginal canal back and forth.
4. While massaging, hook your thumbs onto the sides of the vaginal canal and gently pull these tissues forward, as your baby's head will do during birth.
5. Finally, massage the tissues between the thumb and forefinger back and forth for about a minute.
6. Being too vigorous could cause bruising or swelling in these sensitive tissues. During the massage avoid pressure on the urethra as this could induce irritation or infection.
7. As you become adept with this procedure, add Kegel exercises to your routine to help you get the feel for your pelvic muscles. Do this ritual daily beginning around week 34 of pregnancy.

*Excerpt from, "The Birth Book", By William and Martha Sears