

## Perineal Massage

Five studies show that perineal massage helps prevent tearing of the vagina during childbirth, particularly during the first childbirth. From the 35th week of pregnancy to the day of birth, a woman inserts a lubricated finger and stretches the vaginal opening for 10 minutes day. This procedure helped prevent tearing of the vagina and rectum primarily in women who were having their first childbirth. 80% said that they would repeat massage during future pregnancies, while more than 90% stated that they recommend it for other pregnant women.

Perineal massage involves gently stretching the tissues that surround the opening to the vagina. The perineum is the area of skin between the vagina and rectum.

Perineal massage may make tears or an episiotomy less likely; may reduce the stinging sensation during crowning, and familiarize labouring women with the stretching sensations of birth to enhance relaxation.

It is not within the scope of practice for Doula's or labour support assistants to perform perineal massage. However, both expectant mothers and their partners can do perineal massage, as early as 34 weeks. It is usually done for 10 minutes each day. The following directions are for the expectant mother.

- Sit in a comfortable position. (A warm bath or warm compresses on the perineum for 10 minutes before massage may help with relaxation.)
- Put a water-soluble lubricant (KY Jelly, olive oil, vegetable oil, Vit. E oil) on thumbs and perineum.
- Place thumb just inside of the vagina.
- Press downward towards the rectum and to the sides at the same time until a very slight burning, stinging, or tingling sensation is felt
- Hold the pressure for about 1 minute, breathe deeply and slowly and try to consciously relax the muscles.
- Keep pressing down with the thumb and slowly and gently massage back and forth over the sides of the vagina in a 'U' movement for 3 minutes.
- Relax and repeat once.

**Caution:** Avoid pressure on the urethra (at the top of the vaginal opening), massage gently as vigorous massage could cause bruising or swelling, and do not massage if there is active vaginal infection or herpes lesions.

