

## **PRENATAL PERINEAL MASSAGE**

Massaging your perineum (the tissue between the vagina and the anus) during the last four weeks of pregnancy can help prevent tearing during the birth. Massaging oil into the tissue and stretching it can also result in less resistance to the birth of the head, and the massage can also help you learn to relax the pelvic floor muscles. This technique is likely to be more uncomfortable for your mind than for your body – it's a new experience for most of us and it seems a bit strange. But when the baby's head is crowning, and you are able to consciously relax your perineum because you have practiced, you'll be glad you've done this.

1. You can do this massage yourself, using your thumbs, but it is probably easier in the last four weeks of pregnancy for your husband or partner to do this with you. Make sure that your bladder is empty and that you are propped up comfortably. Use a mirror the first few times so you can become thoroughly familiar with the area.
2. Massage a natural vitamin oil (vitamin E or wheat germ oil, cocoa butter, whatever feels best) into the tissues of the perineum and lower vaginal wall. Pay special attention any scar tissue from a previous episiotomy.
3. Then your partner can put both index fingers about 3 inches into the vagina and press downward toward the rectum. While maintaining steady pressure, the fingers can be moved upward along the sides of the vagina in a rhythmic "U" or "sling" type of movement. Or the first two fingers of one hand can make the "U" from side to side.
4. As you massage each night, your tissues will relax and stretch. Have your partner gently stretch the vaginal opening as wide as possible each time until a tingling or burning sensation, which indicates "far enough." This will help you recognize the burning sensation that indicates that you need to stop pushing for the crowning of the head as it splits out.
5. Hold this stretch, without hurting the mother, for a minute or two, then release. Massage with more oil, stretch again to the maximum, hold, then release.
6. If you do the massage faithfully, your partner will be able to insert more fingers as you approach your due date and your perineum becomes more elastic. This ensures that your tissues are supple and creates the confidence that a baby's head can surely fit through.
7. Do a "Kegel" (contraction of the vaginal muscles) and feel where the PC muscle lies and how strong it is. Feel how difficult the stretching is when you are tensing the muscles of the pelvic floor, and consciously release them as your partner does the stretching. Hint: Keep your mouth and throat really loose during the massage. By doing Kegels after the birth, your muscles will go back into tone.

Women, midwives, and physicians who make use of this stretching during the last weeks of pregnancy really find it helpful in the prevention of tears.