**Perineal Massage**

**What is the perineum?**

The perineum is the piece of skin located between the vagina and the anus.

**How can you prepare the perineum for birth?**

Manually massaging and stretching the perineum during pregnancy may reduce the risk of tearing and the need for an episiotomy. Some women may not be able to perform perineal massage. Check with your midwife or doctor. During pregnancy the perineum may become more sensitive, due to the additional weight and pressure from the baby.

Perineal massage may have a number of benefits, including:

- Increasing your awareness of the perineal area.
- Desensitising you to pressure in this area, which will help you relax more during the second stage (pushing stage) of labour.
- Increasing the elasticity and flexibility of the perineum, which will help it stretch as the baby’s head pushes down during the birth.
- Decreasing the burning and stinging sensations during the second stage of labour.

**When should I start perineal massage?**

At 34 weeks of pregnancy.

Preparing the perineum for massage:

- To help relax the perineum before massage, have a warm bath or shower.
- You will need a lubricant such as wheat germ oil, sesame oil, cocoa butter, vitamin E, KY gel or natural vaginal lubrication.
- Wash your hands or your partner’s hands well.
How do I do perineal massage?

Perineal massage may be performed daily.

Insert both thumbs into the vaginal opening and pull down towards the anus or to positions 4 o'clock, 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock and stretch the perineum using a good amount of pressure for 2 minutes at each position. This may increase the perineal suppleness and elasticity.

When not to do it

If you suspect that you have any infection or irritation of the skin on the perineum then discuss with your doctor or midwife.

This is how to do perineal massage.