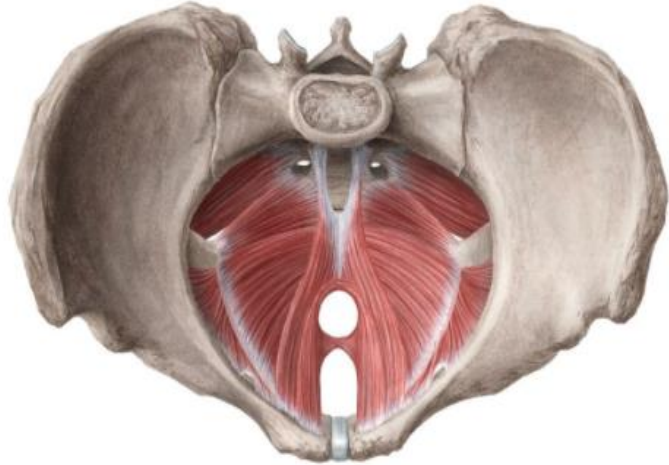


Perineal Massage

During vaginal birth your pelvic floor muscles can stretch more than three times their resting length to allow your baby to descend down the birth canal. It is helpful to massage and stretch these muscles and tissues in preparation for birth.

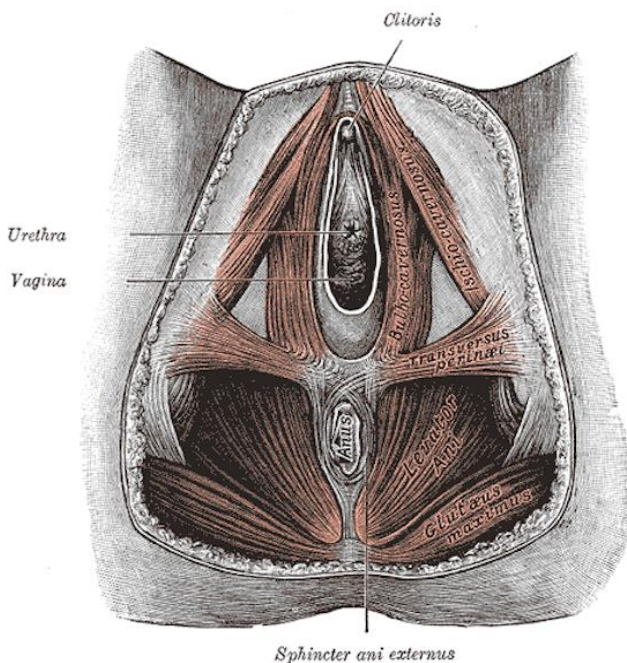
Approximately 85% of women will have some degree of perineal tearing during vaginal birth. Research shows that massaging your perineum from 34 weeks of pregnancy can help to reduce perineal tearing, pain and the incidence of episiotomies (incision to open vagina) particularly if this will be your first birth.



During birth, the perineal tissues need to relax and open to allow your baby to pass through your vagina.

How do I do perineal massage?

1. It can be helpful to do so after a shower or after applying a warm compress. This encourages a good blood supply to the area and can help soften the surrounding tissues.
2. You can perform perineal massage yourself or your partner can do it.
3. Find a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted, prop yourself up with pillows or lean back against a bed rest, perform on the toilet or in the bath. It may be helpful to use a mirror.
4. Make sure your hands are clean and dry, use a water-based lubricant or an organic oil such as: olive, sunflower or grape. Apply to your thumbs and around the perineum.



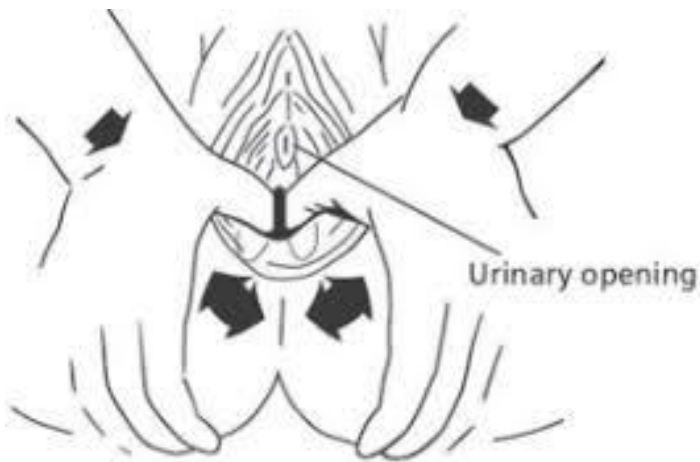
What is my perineum?

Your perineum is the area from your vagina to anus lengthways. In depth, the perineum consists of skin, connective tissue and pelvic floor muscles. The pelvic floor has three important functions in the body:

1. Supports pelvic organs
2. Maintains continence of urine and faeces
3. Contributes to sensation and arousal during sex

pressure in labour as your baby's head is about to be born.

9. Do not perform perineal massage if you have a high risk pregnancy (unless instructed by your midwife/obstetrician) or if you have vaginal thrush, vaginal herpes or another vaginal infection.

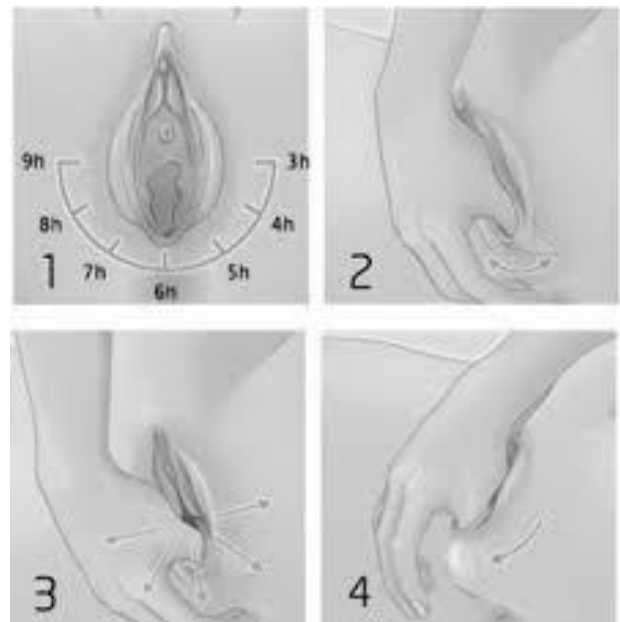


5. Insert your lubricated thumb or thumbs 3 – 4cm inside your vagina. Press down towards your anus and to the sides creating a U shape, 6 o'clock to 3 o'clock (right), 6 o'clock to 9 o'clock (left). Stretch your vagina open as wide as possible until you feel a tingling or a burning sensation. Pause and take a deep breath. Keeping the pressure, move your thumbs from side to side in a U shape. The area may become a little numb and you won't feel the tingling as much.

6. Hold the stretch for about one to two minutes and release. Rest for 30 seconds then repeat a few times for a total stretching time of around 5 minutes. At first your perineum will feel tight but as you practice the tissues will relax and stretch. Focus on relaxed breathing, relaxing the pelvic floor muscles and allowing the tissues to stretch.

7. For maximum benefit perform perineal massage 2 x per week from 34 weeks of pregnancy

8. With time and practice your perineum will become more flexible, you will increase your ability to relax and be able to increase the pressure downwards towards your rectum. Being able to relax through this increased pressure will help you to relax as you feel the



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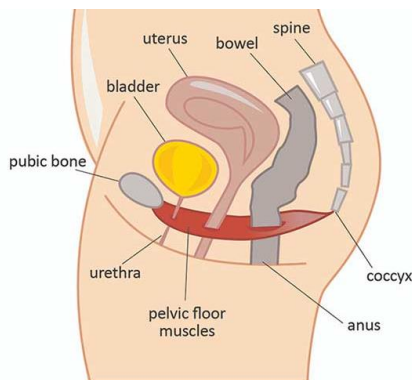
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What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor consists of a group of muscles (attached to your pubic bone at the front and the tail bone at the back) and fascia (connective tissue). It forms the base of your pelvis and supports the bladder, uterus (womb) and bowel. The openings from these organs (the urethra from the bladder, the vagina from the uterus and the anus from the bowel) pass through the pelvic floor.

The pelvic floor plays an important role in:

1. Bladder control
2. Bowel control
3. Supporting pelvic organs
4. Sexual function



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To reduce pressure on your pelvic floor, avoid:

- Constipation and/or straining with a bowel motion
- Persistent heavy lifting
- Repetitive coughing and straining
- Putting on too much weight

How do I do pelvic floor exercises?

1. Choose any comfortable position- lying down is often easier to begin with
2. Squeeze the vagina and anus and draw the tissues up towards your head. Imagine you are stopping the flow of urine and holding in wind.
3. Count how many seconds you can hold for whilst maintaining normal breathing. This will be your 'hold time'

4. Do a set of 10 of these 'squeeze and lifts' holding for 'your number' of seconds. Do a total of 3 sets of these exercises per day. Ensuring at least 2 minutes rest time between sets.
5. As you get stronger and more confident with the exercises you can perform them in a variety of positions including sitting and standing and increase 'your number' of seconds 'hold time'
6. If you are unsure if you are performing the exercise correctly, try to stop the flow of urine mid-stream the next time you go to the toilet and try to remember that feeling when practicing your pelvic floor muscle exercises. This is just a one off check to make sure you are performing the exercise correctly so don't routinely practice the exercises on the toilet.

The 'Knack'

Once you have got used to the feeling of pelvic floor muscle exercises it is good to practice tightening and lifting these muscles prior to increases in internal pressure such as when you cough, laugh, sneeze or lift something up.

Research shows that performing pelvic floor muscle exercises in pregnancy may be effective at shortening the second stage of labour, reducing severe perineal trauma, and reducing incontinence in pregnancy and postnatally.

If you're not sure whether you are doing the exercises correctly check out this 3D animation on how to do pelvic floor exercises on the Continence Foundation of Australia Website:

<https://www.continence.org.au/news/invisible-pelvic-floor-now-3d>

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