

Prenatal Perineal Massage

Perineal Massage is a technique used to increase the possibility of delivering a baby without an episiotomy. It stretches the perineal tissues, resulting in less resistance to the birth of the baby, and less need to cut into the tissue to make room for delivery. If the muscles of the pelvic floor are relaxed, there will also be less resistance. Doing the massage helps a woman to identify those muscles and learn to relax them in response to pressure. Massaging the oil into the perineum may soften the tissue, again reducing resistance and the need for an episiotomy.

Instructions

The massage should be done daily for at least 5 minutes beginning about 6 weeks before your due date.

Either you or your husband can do the massage.

Some people recommend wheat germ oil, available at health food stores, and olive oil or other vegetable oils can be used as well.

Make yourself comfortable, lying in a semi-seated position against some pillows.

The first few times you do this, take a mirror and look at your perineum so you know what you are doing.

Dip your fingers into the oil and run it into the perineum and lower vaginal wall.

Doing the massage: If you are doing the massage yourself, it is probably easiest to use your thumbs. Your husband can use his index fingers. Put your fingers 3" into the vagina and press downward (towards the rectum). Maintain this pressure for about 2 minutes, until you feel numbing and tingling. Keeping steady pressure, slide your fingers upward along the sides of the vagina, moving them in a rhythmic U or sling type of movement. Continue to do this for about 3-4 minutes. This movement will stretch the vaginal tissue, the muscles surrounding the vagina, and the skin of the perineum. In the beginning, you will feel tight, but with time and practice the tissue will relax and stretch.

Concentrate on relaxing your muscles as you apply pressure.

As you become comfortable massaging, use enough pressure until the perineum just begins to sting from the tension you apply. You will later recognize this stinging sensation as the baby's head crowns. Husbands can insert more fingers as the woman approaches term and the perineum has become more elastic. This creates the confidence that the baby's head can surely fit through. Proper stretching of the vaginal muscles along with Kegel exercises will provide more elasticity and strengthen them as well.

If you have any questions, ask your class instructor or midwife.