

Perineal Massage

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

INSTRUCTIONS

The massage should be done daily for at least five minutes, beginning about 6 weeks before your due date. You, your husband, partner or friend can do the massage. You may wish to begin the massage after bathing since the tissues are more relaxed. Some people recommend wheat germ oil, available at health food stores, but other vegetable oils could be substituted.

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. You will be able to associate what you see (opening of the vagina) with the sensation of relaxation.

Identify your kegel muscle and contract it. Look into the mirror and see how the opening of your vagina closes. Now, insert your finger into the vagina and feel how "tight" the walls of your vagina are. Relax your kegel muscle. Breathe abdominally, allowing your tummy muscles to relax and even "pouch" out a bit. See how your perineum bulges forward and how the opening to the vagina enlarges. Feel how relaxed and open the vagina is. Move your fingers around and see how far you can stretch the opening. Gentle is the word! Never abdominally push or bear down when you do this exercise.

Doing the massage: If you doing the massage yourself, it is probably easiest to use your thumbs. Your partner can use his index fingers. Dip your fingers into the oil and rub it into the perineum and lower vaginal wall. Put your fingers approximately three inches into the vagina and press toward the rectum. Maintaining steady pressure, slide your fingers upward along the sides of the vagina, moving them in a rhythmic U or sling type movement. This movement will stretch the vaginal tissue (mucosa), 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 is being born and your perineum stretches around it.

If you have any questions after trying the massage, please contact your childbirth educator or birth attendant.