

PERINEAL MASSAGE

Your vagina is made of elastic, folded tissue. The folds open and the tissue stretches naturally as your baby descends through your vagina. This process will be aided if the muscles in the perineum are relaxed and accustomed to stretching. Perineal massage is a technique for preparing the muscles to stretch, increasing the circulation to the perineal tissue and applying oil to increase suppleness. The technique is also helpful because it helps to prepare a woman for the feelings of stretching that she will experience when her baby is born, as well as helping her to become more comfortable with her body. Many caregivers believe that this type of massage can help a woman avoid tearing during delivery.

Begin perineal massages six weeks before your due date. Daily massages are best for maintaining an intact perineum. Be committed to the exercise, but if you get off track and miss a day or two don't give up completely, just get started again!

A woman can do perineal massage herself, using a mirror and her thumbs. However, it is usually easier if her husband helps her.

- ❖ Some people like to apply warm compresses to the perineum for a minute or so to increase circulation and relax muscles before beginning perineal massage. A foot rub or back rub will also help Mom to relax her body in preparation for perineal massage.
- ❖ Apply oil to the massaging fingers (Mom's thumbs or Dad's index and middle fingers). To avoid contaminating the oil, pour or squeeze the oil onto the fingers rather than dipping fingers in the oil. Use a good quality oil such as wheat germ, almond, or Vitamin E. Most people use olive oil and it works very well. Avoid petroleum or mineral based oils.
- ❖ Insert fingers into the vagina about an inch (or up to the second knuckle).
- ❖ Gently, but firmly, using outward pressure apply downward/outward pressure at the bottom of the vagina. Pressure should be firm enough that you begin to feel a burning or stretching.
- ❖ Until you both feel comfortable with the massage, you may try just applying pressure towards the rectum and holding that pressure without moving. Mom, practice your relaxation breathing, consciously relax into the pressure and allow your muscles to relax. Once you are both comfortable, begin movement in a 'U' shape, up the sides of the vagina, applying outward pressure.
- ❖ Continue this massage for about five minutes or for as long as is comfortable for you.
- ❖ Lubricate your fingers again and lubricate your thumb. Place the index finger inside the vagina and, with the thumb on the outside, gently massage the perineal area between the fingers.
- ❖ The tissues will likely be tight during your first massage. However, over time, you will notice that the tissue is more giving.