

## Fact Sheet

### Caring for your Perineum

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#### The Perineum

The perineum is the skin between the vagina and anus, which thins out and stretches over the baby's head (or buttocks) as baby is born.

Many women need stitches (sutures) to repair any tears or cuts (episiotomy) that occurred during their baby's birth. The perineum and vagina are the most common areas where stitches are required.

However there may be other areas of the genitalia that also need repair.

#### To Care for your Stitches

- keep clean-by showering daily, plus using the shower hose or pouring water over the area every time you go to the toilet. Do not use high perfumed soaps. Soap-free formulas or no soap is recommended
- keep dry – pat gently with a clean towel
- change pads-every two or three hours
- for six weeks avoid – powders, creams and tampons.

#### To Reduce discomfort and assist healing

- good hygiene – keep the area clean, wash and pat dry after each visit to the toilet
- **pain relief** – take 2 paracetamol tablets, no more often than every 6 hours
- **an anti-inflammatory drug** – can be taken every six hours for the first two days to help reduce swelling and inflammation caused by the stitches. Check with your midwife or doctor first



- **crushed ice** - wrapped in a moist soft cloth and applied to the swollen area for ten minutes only. Reapply ice every two or three hours until swelling is reduced
- **position** – lie on your side when you are resting or feeding your baby. Sitting on 2 folded towels may help relieve pressure on the perineum. Avoid sitting for long periods
- **pelvic floor exercises** – strengthen muscles and promote blood supply, helping relieve swelling and bruising. Ask the midwife about any physiotherapy classes available or ask to see the physiotherapist if there are any concerns, especially if you have been leaking urine during your pregnancy.

#### Recommended bowel habits:

- drink at least 2 litres of fluid every day
- always go to the toilet when you get the urge
- sit with knees apart, lean forward, rest elbows on knees
- do not strain
- a stool softener may be taken, such as; Fybogel, Normacol, Metamucil or movicol, daily for at least three months – ask your midwife or doctor for more information
- avoid painkillers containing codeine (panadeine, codral) and oxycodone (endone) as these can cause constipation.

#### Healing

The perineum and genitalia need a minimum of two weeks to heal. However you may experience discomfort for longer e.g. six weeks or more depending on the amount of suturing involved.

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The stitches could take 10-90 days to dissolve, depending on the type of suture used. Your stitches will dissolve and do not need to be removed. Pieces of the stitches may fall out from time to time. While you're in hospital a midwife will ask you how your stitches are feeling. Let the midwife know if you are having any:

- increase in bleeding
- increase in pain or swelling
- smelly discharge on a pad
- burning when passing urine
- pain or difficulty using your bowels
- other concerns

### Management of third or fourth degree tears

A third or fourth degree can be described as a tear that has extended in to the anal sphincter muscle around the anus.

The anal sphincter muscle is necessary for the control of flatus (wind) and faeces or bowel motions so it is very important it heals well.

### Avoiding constipation

It is essential you avoid constipation as straining can cause the repair to break down (see recommended bowels habits on page 1)

### Physiotherapy review for 3rd and 4th degree tears

If you are having difficulty controlling wind or bowel motions you can contact the Women's health physiotherapist at Westmead on 98457572, Blacktown on 9881 8302, Auburn on 8759 3177. You can also make an appointment with the physiotherapist if you are having ongoing problems with urine leakage.

### Review of sphincter healing

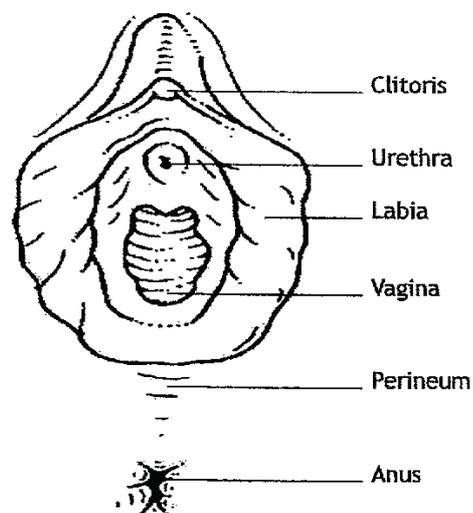
The best way to check healing of the anal sphincter is with a specialised ultrasound.

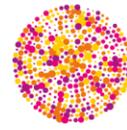
During this examination, which takes only a few minutes, a narrow probe is placed into the lower 2-3cm of the anal entrance so tissue healing can be easily assessed. This examination is not painful but can be a little uncomfortable if some of your stitches have not yet dissolved.

The endoanal ultrasound is performed around 6 months after the birth in the Anal Ultrasound and Physiology Clinic at westmead. If you do not hear from clinic C about your appointment, please ring 9845 6544 to check your referral has been received.

It is recommended to visit your doctor or women's health nurse around 6-8 weeks after giving birth, for postnatal check.

You are encouraged to discuss any concerns you may be having for example, resuming sexual intercourse. For many women sex may be uncomfortable for quite a few months. Using a lubricant may help. Seek medical advice if problems persist.





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### **Pelvic Floor Exercises**

Pelvic floor exercises are important for all women after having a baby and should be started immediately after delivery.

*These are described on the pelvic floor fact sheet.*

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

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