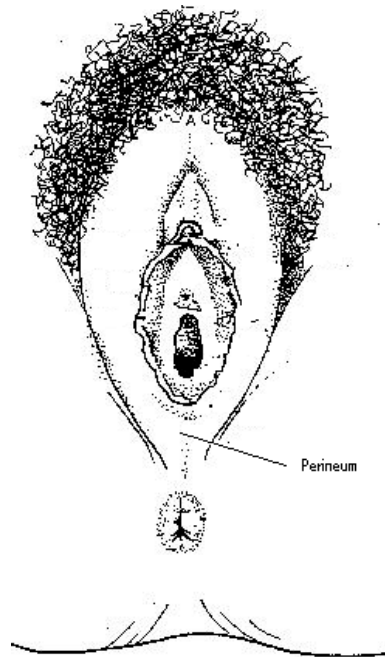


Perineal Massage

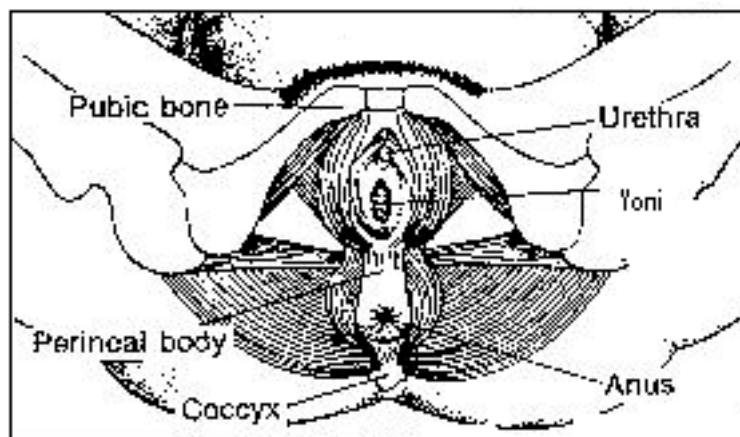
By Carolyn Hastie

The Perineum

The perineum is that amazing, stretchy muscle and skin between your anus and your vagina.



The perineum is a part of the pelvic floor, a networking collection of muscles which form a bowl like shape in your pelvis. The pelvic floor supports your body organs and controls the opening and closing of the urethra (for the passing of urine), the anus (for the passing of wind and faeces) and the vagina (for sex and childbirth).



Pelvic Floor Muscles

The importance of nutrition

All muscles and indeed all cells in your body need great nutrition to work well. Good quality protein, vitamins, enzymes and minerals are essential for your muscles, including your pelvic floor, to maintain their tone, stretch easily and function well. If you are unsure of what makes good nutrition, ask your midwife for some suggestions.

The importance of water

Wonderful water - H₂O is vitally necessary for the electrical circuits to work well in our bodies. We are over 90% water! Each muscle fibre has its own nerve cell. For the electricity to work and muscle fibres to function well, we need a steady supply of pure water. Drink at least a cup of water every hour to flush toxins away and prime the neural (nerve) network.

The importance of exercise

The saying 'use it or lose it' is now recognized as fact. What we don't use, decays. For muscles and indeed every part of your body, to stay healthy, strong, flexible and functioning, it is essential to put them through a full range of movement on a regular and consistent basis. Walking, stretching and weight bearing ensures muscles stay strong, supple, flexible and toned. These activities also exercise the various parts of the brain that are associated with the particular muscle groups being exercised. This is why people who regularly walk/exercise are less likely to get brain disordered

(Alzheimers, dementia, depression etc) as they get older. For the pelvic floor muscles, life long, systematic exercise is protective against incontinence. Lymph fluid is moved by exercise and pelvic floor exercises are encouraged for men to stimulate the flow of lymph through the pelvis and therefore avoid problems with the prostate gland. For women of childbearing age, pelvic floor exercises assist with the ability to stretch nicely when birthing a baby.

Pelvic floor exercises

These exercises can be done in any position and any place. Some people use the time at stoplights when in the car, other people do them whenever they have a drink of water. The important thing is to do them. How and when you do them is something for you to think about and discover ways that help you to remember and do them.

Method: Breathe in deeply down to your lower abdomen. As you breathe out, contract the muscles across the lower part of your abdomen; then, in sequence, tighten and hold the tension in the muscles around your anus, your vagina and your urethra. Hold all muscle groups for a count of five. Release the tension of all muscle groups slowly. Breathe in as you do so. Repeat five times. Finish with tightening the muscles. Repeat these instructions several times a day (stopping at traffic lights; when having a drink of water etc). Do them for the rest of your life.

Perineal Massage

Research shows that becoming aware of the stretchability and sensations of stretching are helpful for women in avoiding trauma to their perineums during birth. It is more helpful to those women who haven't had a baby before. Becoming aware of how easily this area of the body stretches lets the woman relax more when it is important to do so. Being familiar with the sensations of

stretching when letting a baby be born is similarly helpful as the woman can relax more when those feelings are known and expected as the baby wriggles its way through the vagina. Relaxing more enables greater stretchability, so it is a win-win situation.

You can do the perineal stretching yourself, or your partner may like to join you. Some couples make it part of their lovemaking. Other people take it very seriously and approach it like a task. It is much more rewarding if you can decide to enjoy yourself in getting to know your body and its capabilities more.

There are two aspects to perineal stretching. One is internal stretching, the other is external.

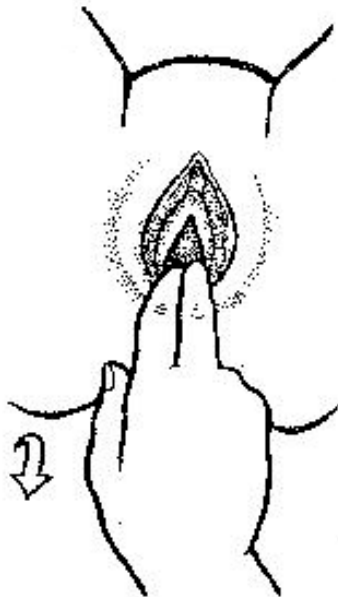
You will need to have clean hands, some good quality oil, olive or wheatgerm is good, for the external massage and some pillows to lean against.

You can repeat each of these activities 20 to 30 times on each occasion. It is useful to start perineal stretching/massage at about 34 weeks and do it each day until your baby is born. You will notice the way the perineum becomes more elastic the closer you get to birth. You can see what a wonderful job your hormones do in preparing your body for the birth of your baby.

Internal Perineal Massage

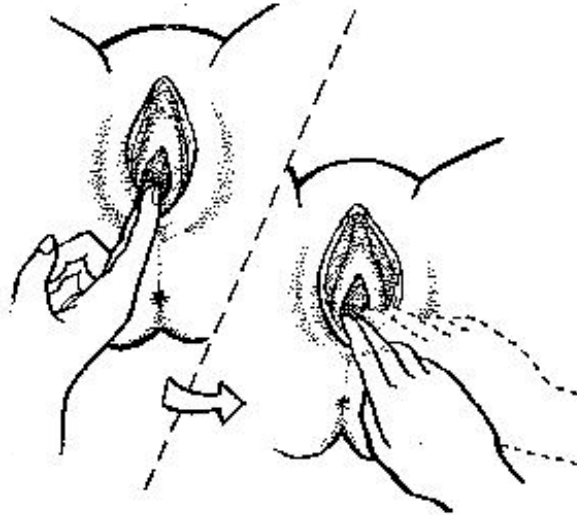
Step 1. Gather the things you need and make sure you are in a comfortable supported position, leaning back on pillows.

Step 2. Place two fingers inside the opening to the vagina; gently press down and pull the perineum out a little towards you (if you are the partner) and away from you, if you are the woman herself doing the stretching. See diagram.



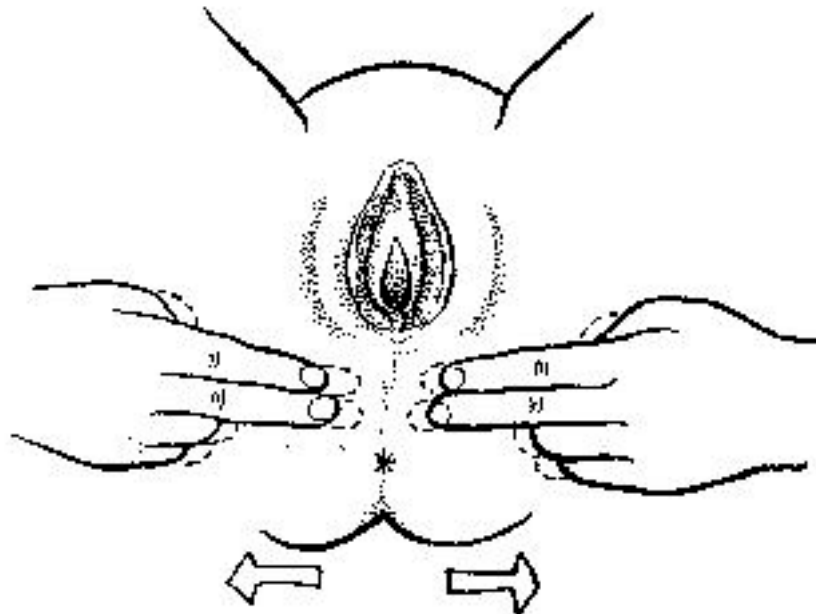
Step 3. Move your fingers, slowly, gently and methodically, from one side of your vagina in a half circle, taking your fingers down around the perineum area and around to the other side. Pull down and to the side and out to increase the tension on the area. See diagram below. If you imagine the

area like the face of a round clock face with hands, you only move your fingers from 3 to 6 to 9 on the clock face and back again. Repeat this stretch and pull 20 to 30 times. You can use your right hand to stretch and massage the right side of your perineum and your left hand on your left side. Your partner can assist by placing two fingers in the opening of the vagina and come down and across from side to side as suggested.

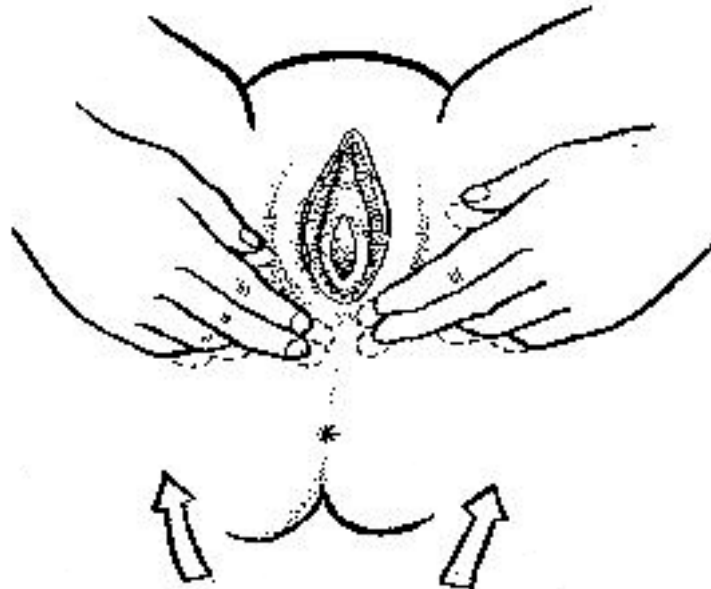


External Massage

Lateral stretch: Place two or three fingers of each hand in the centre of the perineum and pull them out towards your thighs, stretching the skin.



Vertical stretch – up: Place two or three fingers of each hand in a V formation on the perineum and pull up in the direction of your pubic bone, each side of your labia; pull up to where your hair starts on your labia.



Vertical stretch – down: place your thumbs in the centre of your perineum and push your thumbs apart in opposite directions.

