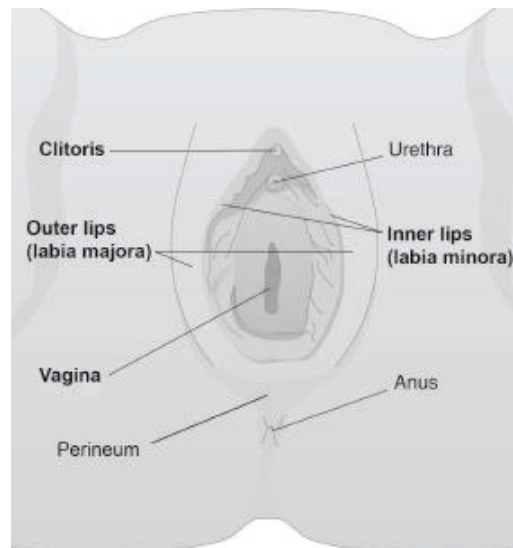


Perineal care

Information for patients

What is a perineal tear?

The perineum is the area between the vagina and the anus. During vaginal birth this area stretches to allow the baby's head to pass through. Sometimes this area is cut (episiotomy) or may tear to some extent. If this happened during your delivery, you may have had stitches. Your midwife or doctor may have discussed this with you. Up to 90% of women tear during childbirth. We cannot predict or prevent a tear.



Looking after my perineum

- Shower every day and keep the perineal area clean and dry. Avoid soaps and antiseptics
- Take pain killers regularly if you need to.
- If it stings when you pass urine, pour water over your perineal area while passing urine
- Always wipe from front to back after opening your bladder or bowels (going to the toilet)
- Use high absorbency sanitary towels and change regularly. Wash your hands before and after
- Wear clean cotton or disposable underwear. You may want to wear slightly more supported underwear to stop the sanitary towel from slipping
- If sitting is uncomfortable, try placing a rolled up towel or a pillow under each buttock so the perineum avoids contact with the chair
- Lying on your side is the best position to relieve pressure on the perineum. This is also a good position to be in while you breastfeed
- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods of time during the first two weeks
- If your perineum is very sore or swollen, wrap an ice pack in a damp towel, lie on your side and put it between your legs for five minutes. Do not put the ice in direct contact with your skin.

- Start pelvic floor exercises from 24-48 hours after birth. This will speed up healing, help you to control your bladder and shrink haemorrhoids. Start with gentle squeezes, little and often.

Your stitches should dissolve within 7 – 10 days, and your perineum should be completely healed within 12 weeks.

Bladder care

It is very important to make sure that you pass urine after your baby is born. If you have not passed urine within six hours of birth or after your catheter has been removed, you can use these tips to help:

- Lean forwards while sitting on the toilet
- Sit quietly on the toilet with the tap running
- Take your time, let yourself relax
- Rock gently back and forth while sitting on the toilet
- Use your fingers to tap over your bladder
- Ask the midwife or doctor for pain relief.

Ask someone to look after your baby, to give you time to do this.

If you have any of the following symptoms, tell your midwife immediately as your bladder may not be working properly, and you may need medical attention:

- Pain while passing urine
- Unable to pass urine
- Unable to control urine
- Lower abdominal pain
- You need regular trips to the toilet but can only pass small amounts of urine.

Bowel care – avoid constipation and straining

- Make sure you drink at least 1.5 litres of fluid every day while your are breastfeeding
- Eat plenty of fibre. For example fresh fruit and vegetables, cereals, wholemeal breads and pasta
- When you have a bowel movement you may find some extra support will make it more comfortable. Try applying a small amount of pressure over the perineum with a sanitary pad or tissue. If you had a caesarean section, support your wound with a folded towel to help you feel more comfortable
- Do not wait once you have felt the urge to open your bowels
- Give yourself time to go and do not rush
- Exercise such as gentle walking encourages regular bowel habits
- Position to open your bowels:
 - Knees higher than hip
 - Lean forwards
 - Keep your back straight
 - Do not strain.

How can I help speed up my recovery?

- Do your pelvic floor exercises as often as you can. A good routine is to do this every time you are feeding your baby
- It is vital that you have enough rest to allow your body to recover
- Sit back in a chair with a pillow or towel behind your back or waist, with your feet touching the floor. Rest back in the chair when feeding and place the pillow on your lap to support your baby

- To avoid straining your back, change your baby at waist height -so you do not need to bend forward. When you wash your baby or if you are standing, kneel next to the bath and make sure the baby bath is at waist height
- Gradually return to exercise – brisk walking is a good way to exercise
- Avoid high impact exercise like running for at least three months after you have had your baby.

Who do I contact with queries and concerns?

If you have any queries, contact your women's health physiotherapist for advice.

Tel: 020 3299 8416 / 4007.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS:

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Fax: 020 3299 3626

Email: kch-tr.pals@nhs.net

You can also contact us by using our online form at www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: kch-tr.palskent@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.