



## LOCAL ANTENATAL COURSES FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

### WAYS TO AVOID STITCHES

**BEFORE LABOUR** - Improve the tone of your pelvic floor muscles and suppleness of your perineum;

1. Pelvic floor exercise-get to know what your perineum feels like, help it to relax
2. Perineal massage-from about 36 weeks onwards with Vitamin E, wheat germ, grape seed or olive oil.

**DURING LABOUR** - position

1. Lying on your side to slow down the birth of the baby's head - your midwife can control the delivery
2. Upright position - gravity helps your baby's head to descend, pressure is more evenly distributed around the perineum.
3. Smile to relax your perineum.

**DURING LABOUR** - Your Midwife

1. Write your wishes into your birth plan so your midwife knows if you would prefer not to have an episiotomy
2. If an episiotomy is suggested ask why, and ask if you can have more time to allow the perineum to stretch if the baby is all right.

### HELP AFTER HAVING STITCHES

1. Do pelvic floor exercise as soon as possible, to improve and promote healing.
2. Walking prevents stiffness and helps reduce swelling.
3. Sit on an inflatable rubber cushion, NOT a rubber ring. Or on two pillows under each thigh (valley cushion is comfortable, and can be hired from the NCT)
4. Hot compresses (hot flannel wrung out in hot water) help circulation and speed healing. Alternatively, sitting on an ice pack (eg pack of peas), reduces swelling.
5. Warm bath with 20 drops of Hypercal in a shallow bath, do not soak too long, or the stitches will soften. Weeing (urinating) in the bath doesn't sting and urine is sterile or alternately pour a jugful (or fill a bottle with a "sports cap") of warm water with 10 drops of Hypercal over your vagina as you need to wee in the toilet (sit well back on the toilet) and this can stop the sting but does need some practice. Use a warm hair drier to dry yourself.
6. Taken as soon as possible Arnica tablets reduce swelling, bruising and Hypercal promotes healing (as does Vit C).
7. When opening bowels, press a clean sanitary towel against the stitches to prevent straining.
8. Drink plenty of fluids to dilute urine and prevent constipation. Eat plenty of roughage - bran, wholemeal bread, dried fruit and fresh fruit and vegetables.
9. Use a mirror to look at your stitches. They may not look as bad as you think!
10. Use soft sanitary towels. A little KY jelly prevents the towel sticking to the stitches, and is good lubrication when starting intercourse again.
11. Bring up any continued problems at your postnatal check. Do not accept that "you will never be the same again". Your pelvic floor, and capacity of your bladder should be the same again. Your pelvic floor, and the capacity of your bladder should be as good as before you had your baby, within 3 months. If you have problems with pelvic floor, or back, you can self refer to your obstetric physiotherapist, up to 8 weeks postnatally. After that you need a GP referral.

Pelvic floor exercises are very important! Do them for the rest of your life.

Extracts taken from The NCT Book of Pregnancy, Birth and Parenthood and article by Elizabeth Andrew DEBRA JONCKER 1997<sup>1</sup>