



LOCAL ANTENATAL COURSES FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

EPISIOTOMIES , TEARING AND YOU

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“That was the most unkindest cut of all” - Julius caesar

No woman wants an episiotomy , but just wishing won't help to keep them away. What is more practical is for pregnant women and her partner to massage and stretch the vaginal tissues and perineal area in the weeks before delivery , to make them more supple.

PERINEAL MASSAGE - The perineum is the area between the back of the vagina and the anus. It is the area which fans out most as your baby's head is being born. If you squat down and look in a mirror , you will be able to see your perineum , and can feel the thickness of the skin by putting your thumb inside your vagina , against the back wall , and placing a finger outside . As your baby's head is born , this skin will thin out and open an amazing amount , and return to its normal size afterwards. Massaging your perineum during pregnancy may help it become more supple and stretchy , and also help you be more aware of sensation around your vagina.

TIMING - The exercise should be begun about 4 weeks before your due date , and it needs to be done regularly , every day at first. This regular practice will accustom the perineum to stretch , so the birth will not be such a nasty shock for it.

METHOD - Place your thumb inside the vagina against the back wall , with your forefinger on the perineum , and massage gently , trying gradually to stretch the vaginal opening. Some people like to use wheatgerm or grape seed oil to lubricate the perineum while massaging. You can do perineal massage yourself , or suggest your partner does it for you. your partner can try gradually inserting fingers into the vagina and stretch open until a stinging sensation is felt , hold for a few seconds and then release , gradually increasing the number of fingers inside the vagina.

Don't forget your pelvic floor exercises. These, together with the massaging help prepare your body for the 2nd stage.

If you do have an episiotomy..... not all episiotomies are unnecessary!. It may have been unavoidable , and even if it was not , you can make yourself miserable by thinking about it. Your preparation will be worthwhile , because it will help you heal in the shortest possible time.



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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

birthmatters

AT THE START OF FAMILY LIFE



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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.