



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Perineal repair

Issued by Obstetrics and Gynaecology

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www.northumbria.nhs.uk

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with information about perineal repair and your aftercare.

Your perineum is the area of skin and underlying tissue between your vagina and your back passage. This area is at risk of tearing during the delivery of your baby. Tears can occur in the perineum, labia (lips of the vagina) and inside the vagina. You may hear the following terms used by your doctor or midwife:

Bruising - bruising can be caused by your baby's head coming down your vagina and over your perineum at the birth. A forceps or ventouse delivery may also cause bruising.

Graze - Superficial damage to the perineal skin.

First degree tear - Injury to the perineal skin only.

Second degree tear - Injury to the perineal skin and underlying muscle.

Third and fourth degree tears - Injury to the muscles of the anal sphincter and/or the skin of the anus or rectal muscles (back passage).

Episiotomy - A cut made into your perineum to help deliver your baby.

First and second degree tears are relatively common occurrences. Third and fourth degree tears are rare. We do not have a policy of routinely performing episiotomies. For normal deliveries, one may be performed by your midwife to make more space in order to aid the delivery of your baby. Your doctor may perform an episiotomy if you need a forceps delivery. You will be given a separate leaflet if you suffer a third or fourth degree tear.

Which tears need to be stitched?

It is recommended that all but the smallest of tears should be stitched. Your midwife or doctor who delivered your baby will explain the extent of the tear and will usually be the one who performs the repair.

What are the risks?

Occasionally the repair does not heal well; this could be due to a number of factors. Occasionally infection of the perineum may slow the healing process and antibiotics may be required. Rarely a small operation may be necessary.

What are the benefits?

- The wound will heal quicker.

Are there any alternatives?

- The only alternative is to have no stitches.

Are there any side effects?

- You may feel tender and uncomfortable for the first few days following the repair. However, the discomfort should ease as your perineum heals.

What happens following delivery?

Following your delivery you will be examined to check if you require stitches. This is usually done as soon as your placenta has been delivered.

Your midwife will make sure that you are as comfortable as possible. You will be offered Entonox ("gas and air") to breathe and help you relax.

An examination light may be used to make sure that we can fully assess your perineum and vagina.

We will try to ensure that this examination is as gentle as possible, but it may feel a little uncomfortable.

If you need a repair

Usually, repairs are performed as soon as possible after delivery, and in the same room you delivered in. We will:

- Place your legs in stirrups to help support them.
- Make sure that you are pain free. If you already have an epidural, this can be used. Otherwise we will usually inject local anaesthetic into the damaged tissues. Very occasionally, if there is a large repair or you are very anxious, you may be taken to theatre for a spinal anaesthetic.
- The repair will be stitched using absorbable suture material.
- Once the repair is complete, we will also check your anus.

Afterwards

- We will tell you about the extent of the repair.
- We will make sure that you are prescribed painkillers. Usually, we recommend that we give a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug such as diclofenac. This is given once as a suppository into your back passage. Following that you can use pain relief tablets such as paracetamol.
- The stitches will dissolve and will not need to be removed. After a few days, you may notice small pieces of thread coming away in the bath or shower. This is normal and is nothing to worry about.

We recommend you

- Tell us if you are in pain, so that we can make sure you are getting the appropriate pain killers.
- Eat a balanced diet which helps with the healing process. This will also help prevent constipation as straining can stop the repair healing well.
- Keep your perineum clean and dry, to avoid it becoming infected. It is quite safe to have a shower or bath in clean water. Avoid perfumed soaps, bubble bath and douches etc. It is also important to dry the whole area properly afterwards using a gentle patting motion. Daily bathing is advisable.
- Please be aware of the importance of good personal hygiene, i.e. hand washing before and after using the toilet/changing sanitary pad. It is advisable to use maternity pads and change very regularly to avoid infection.
- Do your pelvic floor exercises. If you are not sure how to do them, ask your midwife or the physiotherapist when she is visiting the ward.
- Avoid contamination of the perineum by washing your hands before and after using the lavatory or changing sanitary towels.
- Wait until the repair is fully healed before resuming sex. This is to avoid infection or breakdown of the repair.
- Let us know if later on you find that your healed perineum is uncomfortable, particularly during sex. If you find you are having problems, your own GP will be able to arrange for you to see a specialist doctor.

Useful contact numbers

The Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital

Northumbria Way

Cramlington

NE23 6NZ

Pregnancy assessment unit: 0191 607 2815

Birth centre: 0191 607 2318

Ward 16: 0191 607 2016

Berwick Midwifery Led Unit

High Green

Berwick-upon-Tweed

TD15 1LT

01289 356 622

Hexham Midwifery Led Unit

Corbridge Road

Hexham

NE46 1QJ

01434 655 352

Hillcrest Midwifery Led Unit

Infirmery Drive

Alnwick

NE66 2NS

01665 626 732

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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