

What you need to know during pregnancy.

# PERINEAL TEARS DURING (CHILD)BIRTH

SHN

North Central London  
Health and Care  
Integrated Care System



## WE CAN GIVE YOU THE HELP AND SUPPORT YOU NEED

If you are pregnant and want to know more about the risk of tearing during childbirth, visit <https://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/maternity-services/maternity-support/north-central-london-perinatal-pelvic-health-service>, or scan the QR Code for more information.

Alternatively, please speak to your midwife or healthcare provider. They can give you the advice and support you need.

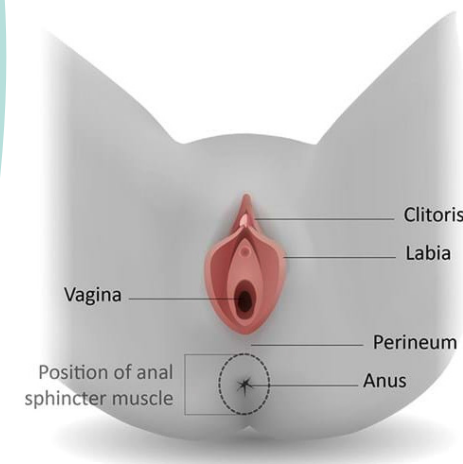


## What are perineal tears?

Your perineum is the area between your vaginal opening and back passage (anus). It is common for the perineum to tear to some extent during childbirth.

Tears can also occur inside the vagina or other parts of the vulva, including the labia.

Up to 9 in every 10 first time vaginal births will experience some sort of tear, graze or episiotomy. It is slightly less common if you've had a previous vaginal birth.



## After the birth

After the birth of your baby a healthcare professional will offer you an examination to see if you have a tear. They will advise you if you need stitches. Most tears heal within 6 weeks with no long-term problems.

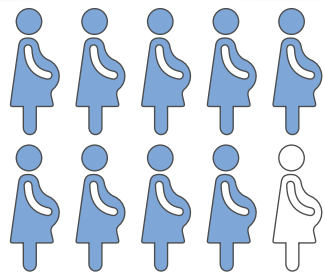
For women and birthing people who do have problems after a tear (such as pain, difficulty going to the toilet, incontinence or mental health problems) specialist help is available.

### 3rd/4th degree tears

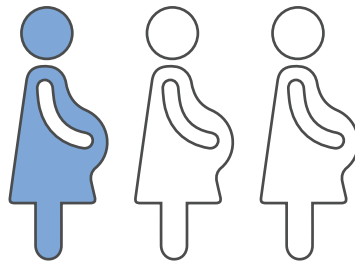
Approximately 6 out of 100 women and birthing people giving birth for the first time, and 2 out of 100 women and birthing people who have given birth vaginally before, will have a deeper tear involving the back passage/anal sphincter muscle (a 'third-or fourth-degree tear'). These deeper tears will need repair in an operating theatre.

You will be supported by healthcare professionals including physiotherapists after your recovery from a 3rd or 4th degree tear.

## Did you know?



**9/10** first-time vaginal births have a tear, graze, or episiotomy.



At least **one third** of women and birthing people have perineal tears that need stitches.

## Factors that increase your risk of a tear:



It's your first vaginal birth.



Your birth happens quickly.



Forceps are used.



An episiotomy is performed.



The birth is affected by shoulder dystocia.



You give birth lying down.



Your baby is larger than average or in an unusual position.



Pushing phase of labour lasts over an hour.

## Perineal massage



FROM 34 WEEKS

From 34 weeks onwards, you may choose to try perineal massage until your baby is born, which has been shown to reduce the risk of tears. This is particularly beneficial if this is your first vaginal birth. You may wish to ask your partner to help with this.

**For more information on other ways to reduce the risk of tearing in childbirth please ask your midwife.**



## How to do it

1. If you have a bath, sitting in warm water before you start may help loosen the muscles around your perineum – if you don't it is not essential.
2. Find a comfy position. The best place is in bed, but you can also do it stood up. Prop yourself up with pillows if in bed to support your back and bend your knees.
3. Use a lubricant like water-based lube, vitamin E oil, almond oil or olive oil.
4. Hold your thumbs in the position shown (see diagram to the left). Press downwards towards the anus and to the sides of the vaginal walls, holding for about 1 minute. You will begin to feel a stretching sensation. Breathe deeply.
5. Gently massage the lower half of your vagina using a U shaped movement for 2-3 minutes. Repeat this 2-3 times.
6. Repeat daily or when possible. It may take a couple of weeks of daily massage before you notice more elasticity in your perineal area.



**DURATION:**  
2-3 MINUTES, AT  
LEAST 2-3 TIMES  
PER WEEK

Repeat daily when possible