

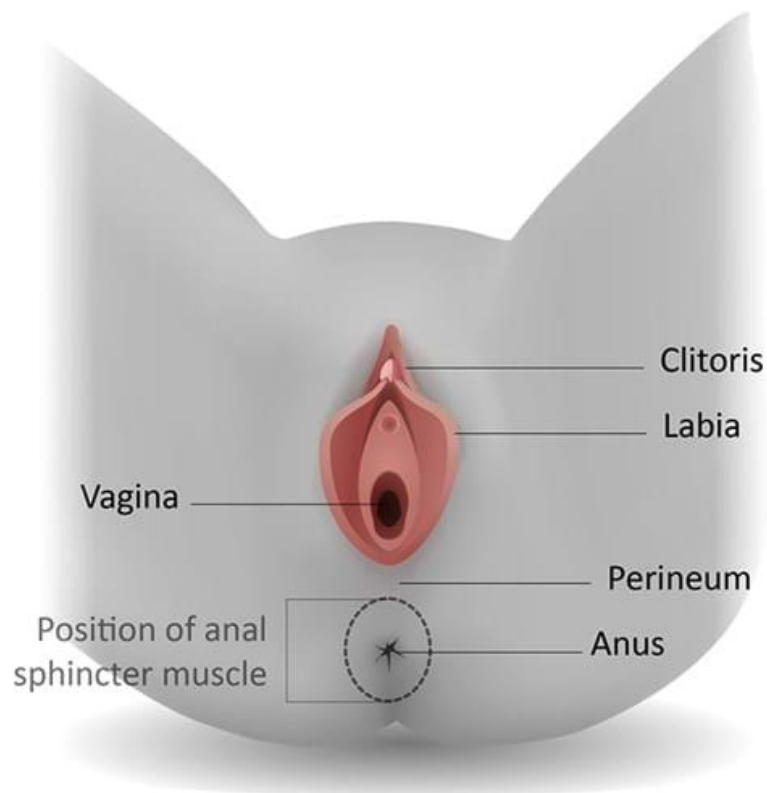
# PERINEAL TEARS DURING CHILDBIRTH

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What you need to know during pregnancy

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## 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 mothers who have a vaginal birth will experience some sort of tear, graze or episiotomy. It is slightly less common for mothers who have had a vaginal birth before.

## 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.

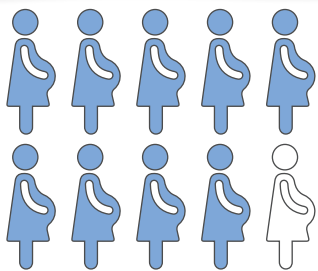
For women who do have problems after a tear (such as pain, difficulty going to the toilet, incontinence or mental health problems) specialist help is available.

### 3rd/4th degree tears

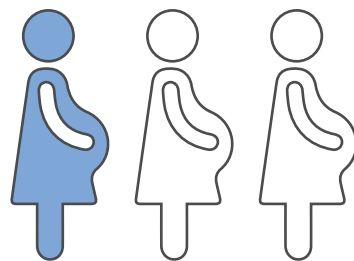
Approximately 6 out of 100 women giving birth for the first time and 2 out of 100 women who have given birth vaginally before will have a deeper tear involving the back passage/anal sphincter muscle (a 'third- or fourth-degree tear'). These deeper tears will need repair in an operating theatre.

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 mums have a tear, graze, or episiotomy



At least **one third** of mums 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



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 35 WEEKS

From 35 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 for first-time mothers. 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. Sit in a warm bath before you start. This may help loosen the muscles around your perineum.
2. Find a comfy position. The best place is in bed. Prop yourself up with pillows to support your back and bend your knees.
3. Use a lubricant like vitamin E oil, almond oil or olive oil.
4. Hold your thumbs in the position shown for about 1 minute (see diagram to the left). Press down towards the anus and to the sides of the vagina walls. Hold your thumbs in this position for
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,  
2-3 TIMES

# WE CAN GIVE YOU THE HELP AND SUPPORT YOU NEED

If you are pregnant and are still worried about the risk of tearing during childbirth, please speak to your midwife or health professional. They can give you the advice and support you need.

Alternatively, scan the QR Codes below.



Dynamic health  
physio services  
– Cambridgeshire



Peterborough City  
Hospital



Cambridge  
University Hospitals