

## Perineal Care

following the birth of your baby



**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this brochure is intended to support not replace discussion with your doctor or health care professionals.

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## Perineal Tears

The perineum is the area between the vagina and your bottom (anus). If this area splits or tears during childbirth it is known as a perineal tear.

Some women will need stitches to repair tears or cuts of the perineum or vagina that can occur during the birth.

These tears can include:

- **1<sup>st</sup> degree tear:** a small tear involving vaginal skin only.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> degree tear:** a tear to the perineum including the skin and the muscles underneath.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> degree tear:** a tear extending to the muscle around the anus called the anal sphincter.
- **4<sup>th</sup> degree tear:** a tear involving the perineum, anal sphincter and the anal canal.
- **Episiotomy:** an intentional cut made through the vaginal wall and perineum to assist with the birth of the baby.
- **Grazes:** splits in the skin on other parts of the vulva which can sometimes require stitches

## 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> degree tears

Having a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> degree tear may put you at risk of:

- Reduced control over your bowel motions and wind.
- Urgency to open your bowels.
- Perineal pain.
- Pain during sexual intercourse.

These symptoms are more common in the first few days or weeks. In most people they settle down over 6-8 weeks.

## Management of 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> degree tears

- You will be given a course of antibiotics to reduce the risk of infection.
- You will be prescribed laxatives to help prevent constipation. Aim for soft-formed bowel motions. You may need to reduce the dose if your bowels become too loose.
- You will be reviewed by a physiotherapist while in hospital.
- You will need follow up with a colorectal surgeon. This bowel specialist will see you after 6-8 weeks and check for the healing and strength of the anal sphincter muscle. We will give you the details of the specialist. You will need to telephone to make the appointment and obtain a referral from your GP to take with you.

## Healing

- Perineal injury usually takes several weeks to heal.
- The stitches will not need to be removed and can take up to 60 days to completely dissolve. Small pieces may fall away as they dissolve and you may see these in the toilet or on your pad.

## When to seek help

Please speak to your midwife or doctor if you have any concerns including:

- Increasing pain or bleeding.
- Smelly discharge.
- Bladder discomfort or burning when passing urine.
- Pain or difficulty opening your bowels.
- If you notice any signs of infection or wound breakdown (you can check the wound daily with a hand mirror).

## Sexual intercourse

Women resume sexual intercourse at varying times. It may take up to 8 weeks for the wound to feel comfortable. Vaginal dryness is more common if you are breastfeeding. Try using different positions and use lubrication to help make sex more comfortable to start with.