

## PREVENTING TEARS

Things you can do during pregnancy to promote a healthy perineum:

**Maintain a nutritious diet**

**Exercise (including pelvic floor exercises)**

**Sexual intercourse**

**Perineal massage**

**Kegel Exercises**

**Address your fear of tearing (This can not be overstated)**

During your birth, the baby's head will gradually move down the birth canal, stretching and opening your vagina. Hormones are released which also help to stretch. When the baby's head is about to be born, listen carefully to your pushing urges and try to facilitate a gentle, slow head delivery. Gently breathe the baby out!

Sometimes you will tear. In most cases small tears can heal on their own with special attention to postpartum perineal care and personal hygiene. Other tears require sutures by the midwife or, in rare cases, a doctor's attention.

**Diet** - Your pelvic floor is muscle and tissue, it needs healthy food as much as the rest of your body.

**Exercise** - In most all exercise's, especially walking, you will improve the tone of your pelvic floor.

**Perineal massage** - For perineal massage, mom lays supported on her back. The partner uses oil on warm hands to massage the outlet of the vagina. Well oiled first and middle fingers are inserted into the vagina approximately 2-3', pressing downward on the area between the vagina and the rectum. Rub the oil into the inner edge of the perineum and the lower vaginal wall. Maintaining a steady pressure, slide the fingers upward along the sides of the vagina in a "U" ling-type motion. This pressure will stretch the vaginal tissue, and the muscles surrounding the vagina, and the outer rim of the perineum. In the beginning mom may feel the tightness of the muscles; but with time and practice, the tissue will relax. Mom should practice relaxing the extended muscles by picturing the perineum opening outward as pressure is applied.

**Sexual Intercourse** - Helpful in and of itself. Perineal massage and Kegels can be added to love making to increase all of the benefits.

**Kegel Exercises - DO AT LEAST 30 to 50 EVERY DAY!**

Kegel exercises, or pelvic floor exercises, are a very important part of a woman's health not only during pregnancy but throughout her life. The muscles of the pelvic floor support all the weight of the internal organs such as the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, rectum, and bladder. This is a lot of work, especially late in pregnancy when the uterus carries a lot of extra weight.

If the pelvic floor muscles are strong, a woman has good control of her bladder. If they are weak, sometimes the extra stretching and pressure on the bladder during birth can lead to urinary incontinence. Strong vaginal floor muscles also hold the uterus in its proper place after birth, preventing it from slipping down in the vagina. Women who practice Kegels also tone the muscles of the vagina, benefiting sexual relations.

**Learning Kegels:** Next time you sit down to urinate; squeeze the muscles in your vagina to make the flow stop. Then, relax the muscles and begin to urinate again. The muscles you are using are the pelvic floor muscles. Now that you have identified the pelvic floor muscles and know what it feels like to squeeze them, you can practice Kegels anywhere (BUT, don't do them when urinating once you know how - you shouldn't be stopping your urine flow regularly). You can squeeze and relax your muscles without anyone noticing! Standing up, sitting down, lying down, driving, watching TV...do them all day long!

Quick flicks: squeeze and release the pelvic floor muscles quickly and repetitively.

Elevators: think of the vaginal floor as an elevator. Squeeze the muscles just a little bit, pulling them up as if the elevator were rising to the "first floor". Squeeze a little more to rise to the "second floor" and so on until you get to the fifth floor. Release the muscles gradually to return "down" to the first floor.

With your partner: have your partner place fingers or penis inside your vagina. Contract and release your muscles until your partner tells you your "grip" is getting weaker. Rest...repeat.

**dressing your fears** - It's pretty simple, if you are afraid of tearing, you will be afraid to push your baby out. Your bottom will tighten, and will tear. Remedy? Relax. Do your preparations, address your fear, and let it go. You will relax, you will let your baby out and your bottom will be fine. If this is a big issue for you mention it to your midwife, she can help you to work through it. Fear of tearing is probably the greatest cause of torn bottoms!