

# Taking care of your perineal wound after childbirth

Maternity Services

Information for Patients

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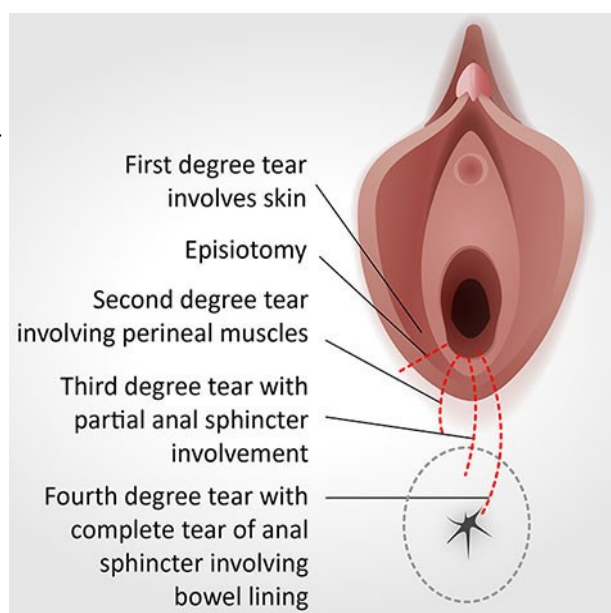
## Introduction

This leaflet has important information about how to care for your wound after vaginal childbirth (a perineal wound).

You may have had a tear or a cut whilst giving birth. There are 4 levels of tear:

1. A first degree tear happens to just the skin or top layer of the vagina.
2. A second degree tear happens to the skin and muscles around the vagina.
3. A third degree tear goes deeper into the muscles around your back passage.
4. A fourth degree tear is the deepest tear going into the lining of your back passage.

For some, we may need to give a cut (episiotomy) into the skin and muscles around the vagina. This is like a second degree tear.



Courtesy of RCOG

Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## What should I expect after childbirth?

During childbirth, as many as 90% of patients have a tear or graze, or get a cut (episiotomy). We use stitches to repair tears and episiotomies. At first your wound may feel slightly sore and swollen. This should settle quickly with pain relief medicine. You may also feel some knots or lumps from the stitches. The stitches dissolve very quickly. After a week you may see some threads come away when you wipe or after using the toilet. This is normal as long as the edges of the wound are staying together.

Your midwife will offer to check your wound at every appointment. It is important that you let the midwife do this, even if you feel happy with how it is healing. It might be helpful for you or your birthing partner to use a mirror to regularly check your wound. This way, you can notice any changes and report them to your midwife or doctor. Be sure to ask your midwife or doctor to examine your perineum at each visit.

## What can you do to help your wound heal?

- After using the toilet, you can clean the wound with a bidet or by pouring body temperature water over the area using a jug.
- Clean your wound daily in the shower or with a short bath. Use only water to do this.
- Change your maternity pad every few hours. We recommend maternity pads because they are softer, more absorbent, and lack plastic backing which can interfere with wound healing.
- Always wash your hands before and after changing your maternity pad, using the toilet, or cleaning your wound.
- After cleaning, gently dry the area with a clean towel. Wipe from front (vagina) to back (bottom).
- Take paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly for pain relief. If you cannot take these or need stronger medication, talk to your doctor or midwife.
- Ice-packs can help reduce swelling and pain. You can apply an ice-pack several times a day for up to 10 minutes. Always wrap the ice-pack in a cloth. Do not make direct contact with the wound.
- Sitting, standing, and walking may put pressure on the wound, causing discomfort. Take regular breaks by lying down or lying on your side to relieve pressure. You can let your wound air when you do this.
- Try different positions while feeding your baby to reduce pressure on the wound.

## Going to the toilet

Going to the toilet may feel uncomfortable. When peeing, pouring body-temperature water over the area with a jug can reduce stinging. Be sure to stay hydrated, as diluted pee stings less.

When having a poo, try not to strain. This stops extra pressure being put on your stitches and pelvic muscles. Wait until you feel the urge to go. When seated on the toilet, try using a footstool to raise your knees above your hips. This helps the poo to pass more easily. Take deep abdominal breaths when pooing. This helps you to stop straining. For comfort, you can hold a pad against your perineum while having a bowel movement.

To help avoid constipation, eat fibre-rich foods and drink plenty of water. You can easily increase your daily fibre intake with a couple of spoons of linseeds with your food or chia seeds soaked in water. If you had a tear in your anal sphincter muscles, you should have been given laxatives to soften your stools. Please take these as directed by the midwife or doctor.

## Staying healthy

You will find your own balance in how much activity you can manage. It is important to keep moving regularly.

Eating well is important for healing. Try to eat a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and proteins like meat, fish, and pulses.

## Pelvic floor exercises

You can start pelvic floor exercises straight after birth. Focus on gentle squeezes at first. These exercises will boost blood flow to your wound, reduce swelling, and support healing. At first you may find your pelvic floor muscles feel weak or that you have lost sensation. This often gets better with time and practice. You can visit <https://yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/> and search for 'Exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles for women' or search for leaflet number 236 for more information. Or visit POGP's booklet on pelvic floor exercises: [https://thepogp.co.uk/userfiles/pages/files/resources/20818\\_pogp\\_pelvicfloor\\_for\\_women\\_signed\\_off\\_1.pdf](https://thepogp.co.uk/userfiles/pages/files/resources/20818_pogp_pelvicfloor_for_women_signed_off_1.pdf)

## What complications can happen?

It is uncommon for problems to happen. If you notice any of the following, please get in touch with your midwife, maternity assessment unit or GP as soon as possible:

- Increased pain,
- New bleeding from the wound,
- Discharge that looks like pus,
- An unpleasant smell coming from the wound,
- Feeling generally unwell or having a fever,
- Stitches coming loose or the wound looks like it is opening up (stitches are meant to start dissolving after 7 days).

## Quick links to information and support



**Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: Tears Hub**

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/perineal-tears-and-episiotomies-in-childbirth/>



**Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy: Patient Information**

<https://thepogp.co.uk/resources/booklets/>



**MASIC: Information and support for women who have suffered an obstetric anal sphincter injury**

<https://masic.org.uk>



**Birth Trauma Association: Supporting parents who have experienced birth trauma**

<https://www.birthtraumaassociation.org>

**Contact details:** If you have urgent concerns about how your wound is healing please contact the Maternity Assessment Unit on: **0116 258 6111**.

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على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

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