Physiotherapy Department

Perineum care after childbirth
(to be read with FIT for the FUTURE POGP booklet)

Your perineum (the area between the vagina and back passage) may be particularly painful or uncomfortable following vaginal delivery, even if you did not need stitches. There might also be bruising and swelling. Start pelvic floor muscle exercises early but wait until the catheter is removed (see red booklet for pelvic floor exercises).

Hygiene
It is important to care for your perineum in the following ways in order to aid healing and prevent infection:

- Keep the area clean by pouring warm tap water from a jug over the area during or after passing urine; alternatively, use a bidet. Avoid using soap or wipes as these may cause irritation.
- After cleaning you may wish to pat dry the area.
- Change your sanitary pads regularly.

Reducing pain

- **Ice packs** – can relieve pain and help reduce swelling. Run a maternity pad under the tap and place this in the freezer in a slight curve. Alternatively you can use crushed ice or frozen peas placed in a bag. The pad or bag must be wrapped in a clean damp cloth or flannel and placed against the perineum for five minutes. This can be repeated three to four times a day, until the pain and swelling have subsided.
- **Feme pads** – these are shaped gel pads which can be frozen and then slipped into a gauze sleeve before applying to the perineum.
- **Warm bath** – may be soothing.

Pressure relief

- When sitting down, lower yourself gently using your arms for support.
- When sitting in a chair you may wish to use a pressure relieving device such as a ‘valley cushion.’ These cushions have been specifically designed to reduce pressure and promote healing. They can be hired from the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) for use at home or from [www.valleycushions.co.uk](http://www.valleycushions.co.uk)
- Or you may use two rolled up towels under each buttock.
- If uncomfortable, do not sit in one position for too long.
- When lying on your side, you may wish to use a pillow between your knees to take away any pressure between your legs.
Healthy bladder tips

- When emptying your bladder, make sure you have emptied it completely. You can do this by altering your position. A good position is with your feet flat on the floor, and sitting well supported on the seat. Try not to hover over the toilet.
- After an epidural or a catheter it is important to return to normal bladder emptying. Try to empty your bladder every couple of hours until your bladder function has normalised. You should seek advice if your bladder feels uncomfortable and you have not emptied your bladder for six hours.

Bowels

When you feel you want to open your bowels, try not to ignore the feeling. This is the best time to go.

- Sit on the toilet with your feet on a small step or on tip toes, lean forward with arms resting on your knees. Relax your body and pelvic floor.
- Do not pull in your abdominal muscles; relax and let them bulge forward and to the side as you breathe out.
- Pass air through your mouth as you increase effort.
- Opening your bowels may seem scary. Many women feel more comfortable if you support your perineum with a clean sanitary pad/hand wrapped in tissues.

For further physiotherapy advice

If you have any of the following problems you can leave a message for the Rosie Physiotherapists on 01223 217422
We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

Document history

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