

MATERNITY SERVICES
WOMEN'S & CHILDREN'S DIVISION

Care of your Perineum following 1st and 2nd degree tears

Introduction

This leaflet aims to give you information about the repair and aftercare of the first or second degree perineal tear you sustained when your baby was born.

What is a perineal tear and how are they classified?

The area of skin and muscle between your vagina and back passage (anus) is called the perineum. The perineum is stretched during childbirth and injury can occur. Evidence suggests that over 85% of women having a vaginal birth sustain some form of perineal injury of which 60-70% of women need stitches (also called sutures) and 5.9% women will experience a 3rd or 4th degree tear (for which we have a separate leaflet).

First degree tears are a mild injury to the perineal skin only that will heal naturally and do not usually require stitching. Second degree tears however are deeper and involve the muscle of the perineum as well as the skin and require stitching.

What is the difference between an episiotomy and a tear?

An episiotomy is a cut made through the vaginal wall and the perineum to make more space to deliver the baby. It is not performed as a matter of routine and is only done when necessary. Research has shown that although episiotomy makes more space for the baby to be born, it does not necessarily prevent tears from happening.

What happens when I have a tear and if it requires stitches?

Following the birth of your baby your midwife or doctor present for the birth will examine your perineum and vagina to assess if there has been any trauma sustained from having your baby. You may be advised that you require stitches.

Midwives are able to stitch second degree tears and also first (in the unlikely event that your first degree tear requires stitching).

In your delivery room stitching is performed with local pain relief (anaesthetic) or epidural if used as part of your pain relief during your labour. Entonox will also be offered should you

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require it. Your legs will be placed into leg rests (stirrups), and your midwife will use an overhead light over your perineal area so she is able to see the area clearly during the procedure. The stitches are dissolvable and disappear completely after a few weeks.

After care

Whilst in hospital we can provide you with Paracetamol to alleviate any discomfort felt following your stitches, or you may self medicate with your own Paracetamol and continue so at home. Paracetamol will not interfere with breastfeeding. Please note that Aspirin is not recommended if you are breastfeeding, because it can be passed to your baby via your breast milk.

Whilst in hospital and following your discharge home it is very important to:

- Maintain a good standard of personal hygiene by keeping your perineal area clean. Change your sanitary towel regularly (do not use any form of Tampon) and have a bath or shower at least once a day. To minimize the risk of infection, it is important to wash your hands before and after you deal with your perineal area.
- Drink 2 to 3 litres of water every day and eat a healthy balanced diet with lots of fibre (fruit, vegetables, cereals, wholemeal bread and pasta). This will help you to avoid constipation, though it is normal to not open your bowels for around 48 hours following the birth of your baby. Your midwife will enquire about your bowel movements with every check.
- Start your pelvic floor exercises as soon as possible after the birth. This will help to increase the circulation of blood to the area and therefore aid healing, as well as toning and strengthening your pelvic muscles. We will give you an exercise sheet to assist you. Should you have concerns regarding bladder or bowel control, leakage or persisting pain you should consult with your midwife or doctor to be able to access out-patient physiotherapy.

Once at home your community midwife will check your stitches are healing well and if there are any problems she will refer you back to the hospital. Your stitches should dissolve and disappear in a couple of weeks.

If your stitches are becoming more painful or smell offensive, tell your midwife as this may be a sign of infection. You may find the area feels itchy and tight. This is normal, however if you have any concerns please speak to your community midwife.

Some couples may worry about starting intercourse for the first time. Only engage in sexual intercourse once you feel ready and properly healed. It is recommended that a natural based lubricant such as 'Sylk' can be used, as aquagel/KY Jelly can be quite drying after the initial application once it has been absorbed.

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Follow up care

You will be advised to make an appointment with your General Practitioner 8 weeks after your baby is born. This is for a postnatal check up where amongst other things discussed, they will want to check your stitches have healed properly.

This appointment offers you the opportunity to talk about any concerns you may have and discuss contraception. If you experience any problems before your check up please contact your midwife, health visitor General Practitioner or physiotherapist.

Contacts/Further Information

For further information or information about the content in this leaflet please contact your midwife or Postnatal Ward on 01245 362305.

Physiotherapy Department, Broomfield Hospital:

Physiotherapy Out Patient Department (01245) 514198

Clinical Nurse Specialist for Continence

01245 318518

If you feel that this booklet has not answered all of your questions, please contact your Community Midwife or GP.

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print, easy read accessible information, audio/visual, signing, pictorial and change picture bank format via the Patient Advisory Liaison Service (PALS) on 01245 514235.



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