

Perineal Tears and Episiotomy

Information for Parents After Birth

www.interiorhealth.ca

What is the perineum?

The perineum is the area between the vaginal opening and the anus (rectal opening).

During a vaginal birth, the perineum stretches to allow your baby to be born. Sometimes the skin or muscles in this area tear. In some situations, a healthcare practitioner may make a small cut called an episiotomy to help with the birth of your baby.

Types of Perineal Tears

First-Degree Tear

A small tear involving the skin only.

Second-Degree Tear

A tear involving the skin and the muscles underneath.

Third-Degree Tear

A tear that extends into the muscles around the anus.

Fourth-Degree Tear

A tear that extends through the muscles around the anus and into the lining of the rectum.

What can I expect while healing?

It is normal to have:

- Tenderness or soreness
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Discomfort when sitting
- Mild discomfort when passing urine
- A pulling sensation from stitches

Many tears and all episiotomies are repaired with stitches after your baby is born. These stitches dissolve on their own and do not need to be removed. Most dissolve within 1 to 2 weeks, although some may take longer.

Most people notice significant improvement within the first few weeks. Healing time depends on the type and severity of the tear or episiotomy.



more information on other side →

Call 8-1-1 Healthlink BC www.healthlinkbc.ca	Nurse	24 hours a day	Daily	Call 8-1-1 to speak with a nurse, ask a dietitian about nutrition, or a pharmacist about your medication.
	Dietitian	9 a.m. – 5 p.m.	Mon – Fri	
	Pharmacist	5 p.m. – 9 a.m.	Daily	
	Hearing Impaired	Call 7-1-1		

Perineal Tears and Episiotomy (*continued*)

Caring for Yourself

Keep the Area Clean

- Wash your hands with soap and water **before and after** using the toilet.
- Rinse the area with warm water after using the toilet if this feels comfortable.
- Pat the area dry from front to back.
- Change your sanitary pad regularly.

Reduce Pain and Swelling

- Take pain medication as recommended by your healthcare practitioner.
- Apply cold packs as directed.
- Rest whenever possible.
- Change positions often and avoid sitting for long periods if uncomfortable.
- Take regular sitz baths for 5-10 minutes by sitting in a shallow bath of warm water.

Prevent Constipation

- It is important to avoid straining during bowel movements.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Eat foods high in fibre, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Take a stool softener if recommended by your healthcare practitioner.

Pelvic Floor Recovery

The pelvic floor muscles support your bladder, bowel, and uterus. Gentle pelvic floor exercises may help improve blood flow and support healing.

Ask your healthcare practitioner when it is safe for you to start pelvic floor exercises.

When Should I Seek Medical Care?

Contact your healthcare practitioner, public health nurse, maternity clinic, or seek urgent medical attention if you have:

- Pain that is getting worse instead of better
- Fever or chills or feeling unwell
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Heavy bleeding

- Increased redness, swelling, or discharge from the wound
- Difficulty controlling bowel movements
- Loss of control of gas that is new or worsening
- Concerns that your stitches or wound have opened
- Trouble peeing (urinating)

When Can I Resume Sexual Activity?

There is no single “right” time to resume sexual activity.

Many people wait until:

- Vaginal bleeding has stopped
- The area feels comfortable
- They feel physically and emotionally ready

Using a water-based lubricant may help improve comfort.

If sexual activity remains painful, speak with your healthcare practitioner.

Follow-Up

Talk with your healthcare practitioner if you have questions or concerns about:

- Healing
- Pain
- Bladder control
- Bowel control
- Sexual health
- Returning to normal activities

Remember: Most perineal tears and episiotomies heal well with time and self-care. If you are concerned about your recovery, reach out to your healthcare practitioner.

Helpful Resources

- IH Pelvic health in Pregnancy and Postpartum:

- HealthLink BC Pregnancy and Parenting:
www.healthlinkbc.ca

