Description

Reducing Trauma: Antenatal Perineal Massage

India Simpson (she/her) – Registered Nurse and Midwife, New South Wales

Social @Periods_to_parenthood

Published in The Practising Midwife Australia Volume 03 Issue 02 Summer 2025, Page 23

https://doi.org/10.55975/HKKM8915

Introduction

Minimising the risk of perineal trauma for women during childbirth is a widely discussed topic in maternity care. The perineum is the muscular area between the vagina and anus, which stretches and relaxes to allow a baby to be born vaginally.[1] Approximately 85% of women experience some degree of perineal trauma during childbirth, which is evaluated using a classification system that categorises the severity of the tearing into four degrees, from first to fourth.[2] A large number of perineal traumas require suturing which can cause some pain or discomfort for the woman.[3] Third and fourth-degree tears may cause long-term damage due to the involvement of the anal passage. These tears are often associated with urinary and faecal incontinence and sexual dysfunction.[3,4] Perineal damage may not only cause physical injury but may negatively affect the mothers psychological and emotional state.[2]

How can we help?

It should be acknowledged that although perineal tearing is common it is not inevitable.[3] Evidence demonstrates that antenatal perineal massage (APM) is an effective technique in helping to prevent trauma.[2,3] APM involves stretching of the perineal area and promotes enhanced blood circulation, improved elasticity and greater softness of the tissue.[1]

However, not all women feel comfortable with perineal massage and often it can be viewed as a taboo topic. Due to the potential benefits of this technique, it is important that midwives understand the procedure and that they share information on how to perform APM around 34 weeks gestation.[1,5]

Supporting perineal massage

APM can be performed by the pregnant person themselves, or they may enlist some support from their partner.[1] APM is best performed when the woman is comfortable and relaxed, in a private space, and getting into a well-supported position such as laying semi-reclined in bed.[5] Before performing the technique, encourage the woman to empty her bladder and to take a warm bath or shower; both are helpful in enhancing comfort and the relaxation of the perineum.[1] Lubrication is advisable, such as massage oil or water-soluble vaginal lubricants. With clean thumbs or forefingers (if a partner is performing the massage) are inserted into the vagina gently pressing down towards the anus and to the sides of the vaginal walls. The thumbs should move together upwards and outwards in a rhythmic 'U' shaped movement.[5] Focusing on breathing slowly and deeply may help her to relax. The ideal duration for this massage is five to ten minutes, one to two times a week.[5] Less benefit is reported with more frequent APM.[5]

Considerations

The massage should not be painful but instead a gentle stretching feeling should be felt by the woman.[1]

References

1. Perineal massage during pregnancy. Government of Western Australia. https://fsfhg.health.wa.gov.au/Our-services/ Maternity/Pregnancy-care/Physiotherapy-during-pregnancy/ Perineal-massage-during-pregnancy. Updated March 07, 2024. Accessed October 07, 2024.
2. Chen Q, Qiu X, Fu A, Han Y. Effect of Prenatal Perineal Massage on Postpartum Perineal Injury and Postpartum Complications: A Meta-Analysis. Compute Math Methods Med. 2022;3315638. doi.org/10.1155/2022/3315638.
3. Venugopal V, Deenadayalan B, Maheshkumar K, et al. Perineal Massage for Prevention of Perineal Trauma and Episiotomy During Labor: A Systematic Review and MetaAnalysis. J Family Reprod Health. 2022;(3):162-169. doi. org/10.18502/jfrh.v16i3.10575.
4. Beckmann M, Stock O. Antenatal perineal massage for reducing perineal trauma. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2013;4:CD005123. doi.org/10.1002/14651858.cd005123.pub3.
5. Antenatal perineal massage: reduce perineal injury during childbirth. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. https://www.racgp.org.au/clinical-resources/ clinical-guidelines/handi/conditions/musculoskeletal/ antenatal-perineal-massage-reduce-perineal-injury. Updated October 2015. Accessed October 07, 2024.

Category

1. Australia - TPMA
2. TPM Articles

Tags

1. 2025
2. antenatal
3. perineal health

Date Created
22nd January 2025