Antenatal Perineal Massage

As you approach delivery, perineal massage may help reduce the chance of tears/episiotomy [cut to the area between the vagina (front passage) and rectum (back passage)]. This leaflet explains the rationale of performing such massage and how it can be performed.

What is the perineum?

The perineum is the area between the vagina and rectum. This area contains the pelvic floor muscles, as well as the sphincter (muscle) that controls the anal canal (back passage). This area can get torn or cut during vaginal delivery, especially for the first time.

What are the benefits of perineal massage?

Massaging the perineum helps making it more stretchable at the time of delivery and thus reduces the chance of tears or the need to make a cut in the area between the vagina and rectum to enable the delivery of the baby. Studies have actually proved this.

How is perineal massage done?

Perineal massage should be performed daily for 5-10 minutes from 34 weeks gestation. You can use a mirror for the first few times till you get familiar with the technique. It might be more comfortable to do the massage after taking a bath. After you feel more relaxed with the practice, you can get your husband / partner to do it for you.

Before starting, you may go to the toilet. Wash your hands and get a comfortable position; sitting on a chair, lying down in bed or standing with one foot raised on a stool.

You can use a lubricant such as oil (almond, olive or vitamin E) or a water-soluble jelly, such as K-Y jelly. If you are doing the massage yourself, use your thumbs, as shown in the drawing. If your husband/partner is doing it, he can use his index fingers.
Diagram 1: Technique of perineal massage.

Place the fingers up to the second knuckle into the vagina. Make sweeping movements downwards and back again, as shown in the drawing. These movements will stretch the perineum [area between the vagina and rectum]. You can also massage the perineum between the thumb and index fingers.

Concentrate on relaxing pelvic floor muscles during the massage. This will help stretching the perineum.

With time and practice, the perineum will stretch more. The massage should not be painful, so if you experience any pain, check with your midwife.

Massaging the perineum should not lead to weak pelvic floor muscles. It should help you gain more control over it, by enabling you to relax it when you want to.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the massage is one way of protecting your pelvic floor. Pelvic floor exercises are another helpful technique, that you should be practicing in pregnancy. You should aim to contract these muscles and hold the contraction to the count of 10. You should do:

- 3 sets of 8 contractions every 24 hours.
- Remember, 3 sets, 8 contractions, every 24 hours (3 X 8 = 24).

This will help strengthen your pelvic floor to avoid stress incontinence of urine (leakage of urine on coughing and sneezing) later in life.

If you have any further questions please discuss with your community midwife.