

## What is it?

It is common for women to have some form of tear during a vaginal birth. A tear may happen when the baby stretches the vagina and perineum during birth. Nine out of 10 women giving birth for the first time will have some form of tear in the vagina, over part of the vulva or the perineum.

The perineum is the area between the vaginal opening and the anus. If this area tears, it is called a perineal tear.

## What will my healthcare team do now?

Your healthcare team will treat any tears after you have given birth to your baby. This will be based on the type of tear you have.

- **First degree tears** - These are small surface tears. They do not require treatment but may cause some pain and soreness for a while.
- **Second degree tears** - These are tears that affect the muscle and skin of the perineum. They usually require stitches.
- **Third or fourth degree tears** - These tears extend into the anal sphincter muscle (third degree) or cause a full tear of the sphincter (fourth degree). This happens in about 1% of vaginal births. Surgery is needed to repair these tears and usually happens soon after you have given birth.

## What will my GP do in the future?

At your 6-week postnatal check your GP may ask you if you have had any symptoms of incontinence such as:

- Leaking urine when you cough, sneeze or exercise
- Not making it to the toilet in time
- Not being able to control passing wind
- Constipation

Your GP may also:

- Check how your pelvic floor exercises are going
- Ask you about your pain
- Perform a vaginal and/or anal examination
- Refer you to a specialist for assessment, if necessary

Your GP will follow-up around 6 months after birth and may:

- Ask you if you have had any symptoms of incontinence
- Ask about ongoing pain or any difficulty during sex
- Perform a vaginal and/or anal examination
- Refer you to a continence nurse or physiotherapist, if you need help with your pelvic floor function
- Arrange follow-up with a specialist, if needed

## What can I do?

To support healing and avoid further problems, you can:

- Keep doing your pelvic floor exercises as directed by your GP
- Take pain-relieving medication as prescribed
- Get plenty of rest laying down – this will help the area to heal
- When feeding your baby, shift your sitting position or feed laying down
- Get in and out of bed on your side – this reduces any strain to your perineum
- Drink plenty of water (eight glasses per day)
- Aim to eat plenty of high-fibre foods (e.g. fruit and vegetables, whole grains)
- Avoid sex until the area is completely healed

## Looking after your stitches and perineum

Wash your hands before and after going to the toilet

Always wipe (or pat) from front to back

Do not use a hairdryer to dry your perineum—this may delay healing or cause burning to the area

Avoid using creams, ointments or powder

Wash the area at least once a day

Eat well and drink plenty of water to avoid constipation

When sitting on the toilet, raise your knees above your hips

Place an ice pack wrapped in a towel or sponge on your perineum to ease pain

# Perineal Tear Follow Up

## What supports are available?

Your GP will provide a referral if you need specialist care. These clinics operate across the South Western Sydney Local Health District:

- Bankstown Hospital Gynaecology Clinic: **9722 8381** or **9722 8380**
- Fairfield Hospital Gynaecology Clinic: **9616 8506**
- Bowral and District Hospital Gynaecology Clinic: **4861 0186**
- Liverpool Hospital Gynaecology Clinic: **8738 4191**
- Campbelltown Hospital Gynaecology Clinic: **4634 4095**

### Private

You can ask your GP for a referral to a private gynaecologist.



## What questions could I ask my doctor?

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| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What symptoms should I look out for?</i>            | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How do I take care of my wound?</i>           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How can I avoid constipation?</i>                   | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How can I manage the pain?</i>                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How and when do I do my pelvic floor exercises?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>When can I resume sexual activity?</i>        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What happens if I don't do the exercises?</i>       | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How will this wound affect future births?</i> |



## Where can I learn more?

- **Australian Government Department of Health** – bladder and bowel for pregnant women: [health.gov.au](http://health.gov.au)
- **Continence Foundation of Australia**: [continence.org.au](http://continence.org.au)
- **The Royal Women's Hospital** – caring for your perineum and pelvic floor: [thewomens.org.au](http://thewomens.org.au)
- **Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists** – perineal tears during childbirth: [rcog.org.uk](http://rcog.org.uk)

This information is to be viewed by someone who has received a diagnosis from their doctor. It is not designed to be used to diagnose a condition or as a substitute for ongoing medical care

Health Resource Directory factsheets are endorsed by South Western Sydney PHN's Community Advisory Committee and local GPs

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