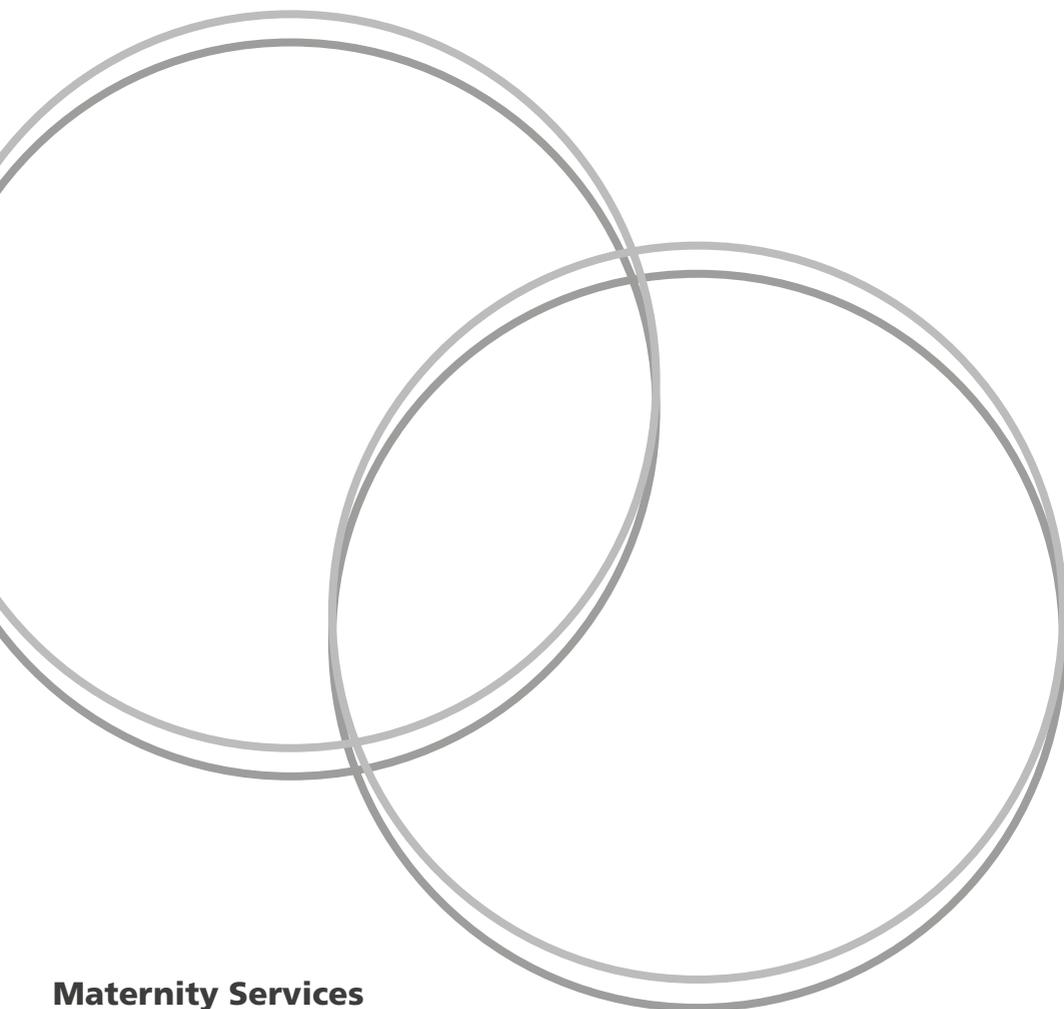




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Care of the Perineum after Giving Birth

Information leaflet



Maternity Services

Care of the perineum after giving birth

It is not uncommon for the perineum (the area between your vagina and back passage) to either tear or be cut during the birth of your baby (the cut is called an episiotomy).

The doctor or midwife will repair the tear /cut using dissolvable stitches. These take about a month to dissolve completely. They will do their best to make these as comfortable as they can for you by placing most or all of the stitches on the inside, so that there are no knots to cause you discomfort when sitting down.

Your perineal area will normally feel tender and sore after giving birth, whether or not you have had stitches. This discomfort may last days, sometimes weeks. The following advice can help with healing, reduce discomfort and lower the chance of infection.

If you have had a tear and do not have any stitches, the tear may take longer to heal completely.

We recommend that the midwife looks at your perineum daily whilst you are in hospital and at each community midwife check. This is to monitor healing and detect any signs of infection.

Keep your perineum clean

- Make sure you wash your hands before and after going to the toilet.
- A daily bath or shower is recommended. Avoid perfumed soaps or shower gels.
- You may find it helpful to lean forward over the toilet to direct the urine away from your stitches or use a small jug to pour warm water over your perineum during and after passing urine. This can help to reduce stinging. You may like to add 3 to 4 drops of lavender or chamomile essential oil to the jug of warm water which can soothe the area and promote healing.
- After passing urine, pat dry with clean toilet paper.
- Change sanitary pads each time you go to the toilet to reduce the chance of infection. It is normal to bleed for 2 to 4 weeks after giving birth.

Use your pelvic floor muscles

- These muscles prevent the leakage of urine, wind and stools. During birth they are stretched and may be weakened. This stretching/weakening may be increased if you have had more than one baby. It is important to recover the strength of the pelvic floor muscles to help you control your bladder now and in later life. If you need advice about some strengthening exercises, please ask any midwife or physiotherapist (a health care professional who treats muscle and joint pain using education, advice and exercise).
- When you use and exercise your pelvic floor muscles it increases the blood flow to the damaged tissue. This helps to speed up the healing process.
- You may find the NHS Squeezy app useful for learning how to do pelvic floor exercises correctly. Squeezy is a pelvic floor muscle exercise app that helps women improve their pelvic floor health. You can find this app at: [www.nhs.uk>apps library>squeezy](http://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/squeezy).

Preventing strep a infection

Group A Streptococcus (Strep A) is a bacteria that can be found on the skin and in the throat. It is a cause of some common infections.

Usually, these infections can be easily treated. However, if the infection gets into your bloodstream, it can be serious. To reduce the chance of this happening and to protect yourself, remember to wash your hands before and after using the toilet. Remember to change your sanitary pad after using the toilet.

If you or a family member has a sore throat, earache or impetigo (a type of skin infection) and you are worried about how your wound /stitches are healing, contact your midwife or GP urgently.

To ease discomfort

- **Painkillers** paracetamol can help with wound pain and anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen can help reduce the swelling. Both these drugs are safe to take when breastfeeding. Read the label carefully and seek advice before taking if you are unfamiliar with these medicines.
- **Cold therapy** such as ice/cool packs used in the first 2 to 3 days can help reduce swelling and ease discomfort. Apply the pack for up to 20 minutes at a time and allow at least an hours rest in between. It is important that the ice / cool pack does not come into direct contact with your skin as this can cause pain and damage to the skin. You can wrap it in a flannel or cotton material.
- **Taking a warm** bath brings great relief to many women. Adding aromatherapy oils such as chamomile or lavender, which both have antiseptic and soothing qualities, may also help.
- There is no evidence that creams or sprays containing local anaesthetic, arnica or sitting on rubber rings can promote healing and they may have a negative effect.

Opening your bowels for the first time

Your perineum may feel bruised and uncomfortable following childbirth. Some women are concerned about opening their bowels (having a poo) because they are worried that it might be painful or that they might damage their stitches. Please be reassured that this is very unlikely. You may like to hold a flannel soaked in warm water against your perineum to provide some support whilst you open your bowels for the first few days after childbirth.

Constipation

We recommend you have a balanced diet and drink plenty of water to avoid becoming constipated. Please speak to your GP or midwife if this becomes a problem.

Resuming sex

It may be weeks or months before you and your partner feel it is the right time. You may find using a lubricating gel will make it more comfortable for you both.

It is also important to think about birth control before you return to sexual intercourse. Please speak to your midwife if you want further advice and information regarding contraception.

If intercourse is painful, please see your GP.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your community midwife or GP.

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Making a difference across our hospitals

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