



# Patient Information Sheet:

## Pre-birth pelvic floor exercises

These exercises are often overlooked by many women but are just as important now as they are after the birth. During pregnancy, hormonal changes and pressure from the growing baby weaken the pelvic floor muscles and if these exercises are regularly performed, the pelvic floor recovers much more quickly after the birth. Another reason to regularly perform these exercises is to give you an awareness of this part of your body so that you can focus on relaxing these muscles during the birth.

### *Exercise Technique*

- Squeeze the muscles in around the anus (back passage), vagina and the urethra, and try to lift **up** inside all at the same time.
- Hold this muscle contraction for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times, resting for 10 seconds in between each one.
- Rest for one minute. During this time try to focus on **relaxing** these muscles.
- Now squeeze the same muscles up and in as **strongly** and **quickly** as you can - short and fast 5 to 10 times.
- Repeat this entire sequence 4 - 5 times each day.

Pelvic floor exercises can be done in any position at any time without anybody else knowing. Be sure to do at least half of your daily quota sitting or standing, rather than all whilst lying down.

Concentrate on keeping your thigh, buttock and abdominal muscles relaxed – focus on the **internal** muscles.

Try very hard not to hold your breath during Pelvic Floor exercises – if it helps, count out loud while you are doing them.

Always brace your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing whenever you cough, sneeze, clear your chest etc or when lifting.

### *Comments for New Mothers*

During the first 24 – 48 hours after the birth it is beneficial to apply ice packs to your perineum whether you have had stitches or not. The ice reduces swelling, bruising and pain. Ask your midwife to show you where the ice packs are kept so you can help yourself to them.

Compression is also very helpful and provides support. This can be achieved by wearing firm undies or bike shorts with two thick pads. Bike shorts also help support your weakened abdominal muscles or “jelly belly”!

After the birth of your baby it is important to recommence pelvic floor exercises fairly soon, preferably after the first 48 hours. Start gently, aiming to hold for 3 seconds, repeat 3 times (resting between each), then after resting for a minutes or so, do 3 quick ones. Repeat sequence 3 times a day. Squeeze only as strongly as comfortable, gradually doing more in a row, holding on for longer and squeezing stronger, as you feel able, until you are back to the number you were doing before the birth (or should have been doing!).

**Please speak to the midwife or your doctor if you would like more information**



# Patient Information Sheet

## Perineal Massage

The perineum is the fleshy area between the vagina and anus. It is this tissue which must relax and stretch as the baby's head is born. The better you prepare your perineal tissue for the stretching of birth, the **less** likely they will tear or need an episiotomy, and the **better** they will heal.

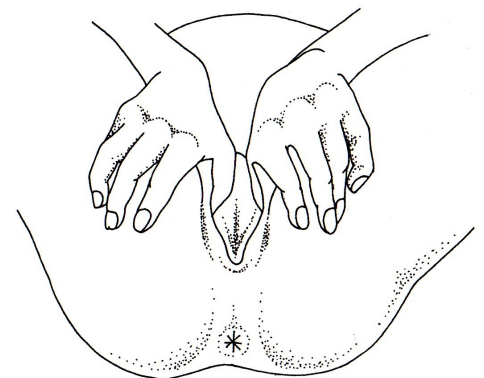
Perineal massage helps to prepare you for the pressure and stretching sensations in this area that often occur just before the moment of birth. Being prepared helps you to relax these muscles and avoid tensing up which can delay the birth.

Midwives report that women who practice perineal massage daily in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy experience less stinging sensation during birth.

Perineal massage should not be done if there is a vaginal infection present, or if you have active herpes lesions in this area.

### *The Technique*

- Before starting, wash your hands and ensure nails are trimmed. Sit in a private and warm comfortable area where you feel relaxed, then spread your legs apart in a semi-sitting position. A warm bath or warm compress on your perineum may help you relax. To become familiar with your perineal area, use a mirror for the first few times you massage (a floor to ceiling mirror works best).
- During massage avoid pressure on the urethra (urinary opening) to avoid irritation or urinary tract infection.
- Use a natural vegetable oil, such as pure olive oil, or water based lubricant e.g. K-Y Jelly, on your thumbs and around your perineum.
- Insert your thumbs as deeply as you can inside your vagina and spread your legs. Press the perineal area down towards the rectum and towards the sides. Gently continue to stretch this opening until you feel a slight burn, tingling or stinging sensation.
- Hold this stretch for two minutes or until the tingling subsides, and gently massage back and forth over the lower part of the vaginal canal for 3 to 4 minutes.
- While massaging, hook your thumbs onto the sides of the vaginal canal and gently pull these tissues forward, as your baby's head will do during the birth.
- When massaging, concentrate on any previous scar tissue as this is much less stretchy than normal tissue and needs more attention.
- Finally, massage the perineal tissues between your thumb and forefinger back and forth for about a minute.
- Partner massage can become a part of sexual activity and love making, but ensure your partner listens to you so they know how much pressure to apply. If your partner does the massage, index fingers or thumbs can be used.
- Being too vigorous could cause bruising or swelling in these sensitive tissues. The massage should not be painful. If you experience any problems please discuss this with your midwife.
- Do this ritual **daily** beginning around the 34<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy.



**Please speak to the midwife or your doctor if you would like more information**