



YOUR GUIDE TO PERINEAL STRETCHING

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Hi! I'm Sarina.

Hi! I'm Sarina, a **Doctor of Physical Therapy** specializing in both **pediatrics and pelvic health** and founder of PelviWell Physical Therapy

If you're pregnant and looking for ways to prepare your body for birth, I created this **free perineal stretching guide** to help you feel informed, supported, and empowered during this special time.

Why am I so passionate about helping women prepare for birth?

Because **pelvic health knowledge should be shared—shouted from the rooftops**. The more women we reach with this information, the better the outcomes and the smoother the recoveries. Every birthing person deserves access to the tools, education, and confidence that can help them feel prepared and supported throughout pregnancy, birth, and beyond.

From Womb to Walking

let's get started
↪

What is Perineal Stretching?

Antenatal perineal massage is associated with lower risk of severe perineal trauma and postpartum complications
Abdelhakim et al., 2020

Perineal massage is the act of applying pressure to the perineum, with the intention of preparing the tissue for the stretch associated with vaginal child birth.

It can be performed from 34 weeks gestation, by inserting a thumb or fingers 3cm inside the vagina, and directing pressure downward and out.

It should be done with no more than 3/10 discomfort, for 2-3 minutes, 2x weekly.

21% reduction in episiotomy

21% reduction in perineal tears

64% reduced risk in 3rd and 4th degree tears

Reduction in time in 2nd stage of labor



BOO TAKE AWAY

Perineal massage
is designed to prepare your perineum for birth by increasing



Blood flow



Our ability to tolerate
stretch



Tissue pliability

The Technique

I know that perineal massage can feel intimidating at first—it's new, it's unfamiliar, and it can be hard to know if you're doing it "right." But with a little guidance and patience, you'll quickly build confidence and learn how to perform perineal massage effectively.

1) Prep (2 minutes)

- Wash hands and trim nails; remove rings.
- Empty your bladder.
- Warm the tissues: warm shower/bath or warm compress for 5—10 minutes.
- Lubricate: apply a generous amount of coconut oil or a water/oil-based lubricant to your thumbs (or device) and the perineum.
- Set up privacy & comfort: soft lighting, steady breathing, pillows for support.

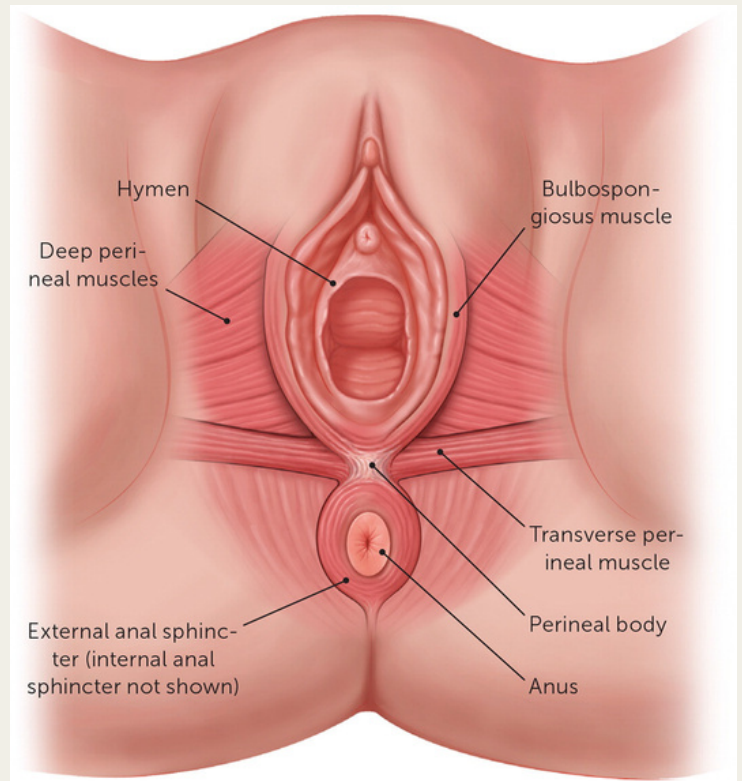
2) Position (choose one)

- Semi-reclined with knees bent and supported by pillows.
- Standing with one foot on a chair, hand on wall for balance.
- Side-lying with top knee bent, reaching behind.
- Use a mirror at first to orient your anatomy.

The Technique

3) Find your landmarks

- The perineum is the skin and muscle between the vaginal opening and the anus.
- Imagine a clock face: the anus is at 6 o'clock. Side walls are 3 and 9 o'clock.



4) Begin the stretch (solo technique)

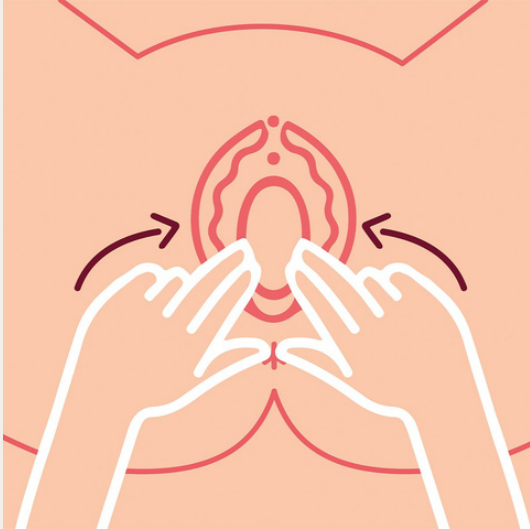
- Place 1—2 thumbs just inside the vaginal opening (about 2—3 cm / 1 inch).
- Press downward toward 6 o'clock (toward the rectum) until you feel a firm stretch/burn—not pain.
- Hold 30—60 seconds while you:
 - Breathe slowly (inhale nose, long exhale mouth).
- Soften your belly, jaw, and pelvic floor (“drop” or gently bulge on the exhale).
- Without lifting off the tissue, sweep in a U-shape from 3 → 6 → 9 o'clock for 1—2 minutes. Move slowly.
- Side holds: Press more into the 4—5 o'clock area (right side) and hold 30—60 seconds, then the 7—8 o'clock area (left side) and hold.
- Finish with a gentle outward stretch at the opening (thumbs apart) for 15—30 seconds.
- Pressure check: Aim for a “hurts-so-good” stretch (3—4/10). Back off if you hit 5/10 or any sharp/stabbing pain.

5) Optional partner-assist

Partner uses clean, lubricated index fingers (gloves optional).

You control depth/pressure; use a 0—10 comfort scale and agree on a stop word.

Follow the same sequence: downward hold → U-sweeps → side holds → outward stretch



6) Optional tool (vaginal massage wand)

- Warm, lubricate the wand; insert 2—3 cm.
- Tilt toward 5—7 o'clock, hold 30—60 seconds, then sweep slowly between 3—9 o'clock.
- Keep pressure light-to-moderate and always breathable.

7) Wrap-up (1 minute)

- Gently massage the outer perineal tissues with circular strokes for 30—60 seconds.
- Wash hands/tools. Expect mild, short-lived tenderness only.

PRo Tips

Exhale during the stretch; think “melt around my thumbs.”

Keep shoulders/jaw soft—tension there often mirrors pelvic floor tension.

Short on time? Do 3 minutes daily rather than skipping entirely.

Consistency matters more than intensity.

Important Considerations

When to pause & check with your provider

Do not perform perineal massage if you have:

- Unexplained vaginal bleeding, ruptured membranes, or active infection (e.g., yeast, BV, HSV lesions).
- Placenta/vasa previa, have been told to maintain pelvic rest, a cervical stitch, or history/signs of preterm labor.
- If unsure, ask your OB/midwife or pelvic health PT first.

After Birth

Wait until your provider confirms healing (often around 6 weeks for tears/episiotomy) before resuming any scar mobilization.

Bonus: Exercises Start Today

EXERCISE #1

CAT-COW

- Only move through as much range of motion that creates a gentle tug, not a strong pull, on the abdomen.

START HERE



- Exhale through your mouth as you start to round your spine, tucking your tailbone and chin while using your abs to further exhale.

- Inhale through your nose and arch your back while you look upward. Expand your belly with the breath and stretch the muscles of the abdomen with the arching of your spine.

- Repeat 10x



EXERCISE #2

CHILD'S POSE

- Take 5-8 deep belly breaths in a child's pose position
- Use a pillow to support your arms or knees. Whatever feels best to you!
- Repeat 8-10x



EXERCISE #3

COBRA POSE WITH HEAD TURNS



- Move into a cobra pose, letting your stomach out and gently turning your head from side to side. Can bend knees more for belly comfort

EXERCISE #4

SUPINE LUMBAR ROTATION STRETCH

- 5-8 deep belly breaths on each side



- Bend and straighten your leg in this position

EXERCISE #5

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

- Start with your hands on your lower belly.



- Inhale for 3–5 seconds through your nose. Try and direct your
- breath into the sides of your ribcage. Pause for 1 second then exhale slowly through pursed lips.



- This focused breathing is the most straightforward, but the most difficult to sit and have patience with. Although the benefits are not as easily seen as a muscle stretch, the internal neural environment will sway in favor of a more regulated state. There is a lot going on while you allow yourself to have nothing going on!

Research

If you'd like to do further research

■ Abdelhakim et al., 2020

“Antenatal perineal massage benefits in reducing perineal trauma and postpartum morbidities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials”

■ Aasheim et al., 2017

“Perineal techniques during the second stage of labor for reducing perineal trauma: Cochrane Systematic Review”

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