



Countess of
Chester Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Third or Fourth Degree Perineal Tears in Childbirth

Patient Information



What is a perineal tear?

Most women, nine in ten, tear to some extent during childbirth. A tear happens as the baby stretches the vagina during the birth. A tear involves the skin and muscle of the perineum which is the area between your vagina and back passage (anus). A tear can also occur inside your vagina.

- 1st degree tear – small, skin deep tear which usually heals naturally.
- 2nd degree tear – deeper tear affecting the muscle of the perineum as well as the skin which will require stitches.
- 3rd degree tear – extending downwards from the vagina through the perineum to the anal sphincter (muscle around the back passage).
- 4th degree tear – extending to the anal canal (into your back passage).

If you have a 3rd or 4th degree tear you will have this repaired in theatre. After the operation you will be offered:

1. Pain relieving drugs
2. Antibiotics
3. Laxatives

None of these will affect breast feeding.

What to expect afterwards

Your midwife will review your perineum if it is painful or you have any other concerns. It is normal to feel pain or soreness around the tear for 2-3 weeks after giving birth, particularly when walking or sitting. Passing urine can also cause stinging.

Continue to take your painkillers when you go home. Most of the stitches are dissolvable and the tear should heal within a few weeks. The stitches can irritate as healing takes place but this is normal.

Ways to ease pain/discomfort

- If sitting is uncomfortable, try resting on your side with a pillow between your knees.
- It may help prevent stinging by pouring a cup of water over your perineum whilst passing urine to help dilute the urine and also wash it away from your wound.
- It may help to support your perineum with a clean sanitary pad when emptying your bowels.
- When breastfeeding it may be more comfortable to lie on your side rather than sitting up.

What can I do to help the tear heal?

- Both rest and activity (gentle walks) are important for you recovery
- If possible for the first 6 weeks, try to avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby
- Drink at least 2 litres of fluids every day, which helps to avoid constipation
- Eat a healthy balanced diet
- Keep the area around your stitches clean and change your sanitary pad regularly
- Go to the toilet as soon as you have the urge to empty your bowels. Try to relax around your back passage and avoid straining. It may take several days for your bowel

pattern to return to normal. When sitting on the toilet to open your bowels try to lean forward with your forearms on your knees and feet on a low stool if possible, or rise up onto your toes to have your knees higher than your hips.



- Where possible in the first few weeks let someone else lift the pushchair or car seat.
- Do your pelvic floor exercises and post-natal exercises.

When can I begin my pelvic floor exercises?

You can begin pelvic floor exercises on the first day after surgery or after your catheter has been removed. Doing these exercises will improve the circulation and help the healing process. It is important to exercise these muscles as they will have been weakened by your pregnancy, delivery and your tear.

How to do pelvic floor exercises



In a lying or sitting position, tighten the muscles around your anus (back passage) and draw them up as if trying to stop yourself passing wind. At the same time tighten the muscles around the vagina and also around your front passage as well drawing them up as if trying to stop passing urine.

At first you may only manage a flicker of a squeeze but continue to practice and build up strength and endurance in the muscle by repeating little and often throughout the day doing 2 or 3 squeezes each time. As you lift and squeeze, try to keep your legs, buttocks and tummy muscles relaxed. Gradually increase the hold time to 10 seconds over the course of approximately 12 weeks.

As you progress, try doing some of these exercises in a standing position. Aim to do a total of 30 contractions spread out over the course of the day. It is important to use your pelvic floor whenever you lift your baby, laugh, change position, e.g. standing up/sitting down, any sudden movement, cough or sneeze. This will help control any stress incontinence and help to support your pelvic organs.

How long will it take to recover?

Your symptoms should have improved in 3-4 months. Most women recover well from a 3rd or 4th degree tear. Whilst you are healing you may notice

- Pain or tenderness in the perineum
- A need to rush to the toilet to open your bowels
- Difficulty controlling wind
- Contact you midwife, health visitor or GP if you have
- Any increased pain, redness or swelling in the perineal area
- An offensive discharge
- Difficulty in controlling your bowels or wind
- Any other concerns or worries.

When can I have sexual intercourse?

It is recommended that you wait 6 weeks before you have intercourse or wait until your stitches are healed and the area is less tender.

Try different positions as this may make intercourse more comfortable

Future deliveries

You may wish to discuss future deliveries with an obstetrician with a caesarean section being a possible option.

If you have any queries please contact:
Pelvic, Obstetric & Gynaecology Physiotherapists:
01244 365176

If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on compact disk and in other languages on request. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on:

Telephone: **01244 366066**

or email: **cochpals@nhs.net**

إذا ترغب في الحصول على النسخة باللغة العربية ، فضلاً اتصل بمركز معلومات المرضى أو تحدث مع أحد الموظفين

若是你想索取這份傳單的中文譯本，請聯絡「病人預約中心」或向其中一名職員查詢。

Si vous voulez cette brochure en français, contactez le bureau des rendez-vous ou demandez à un membre du personnel.

यदि आप यह परचा हिन्दी में लेना चाहते हैं तो कृपया पेशेंट अॅपाइन्टमेन्ट सेन्टर से संपर्क करें या किसी स्टाफ से पूछें।

Haddii aad jeclaan laheyd buug-yarahan oo af-Soomaali ku qoran la soo xiriir xarruunta bukaan ballaminta ama wax weydii xubin shaqaalaha ka tirsan.

Si desea recibir este folleto en español, sírvase contactar al Centro de Citas para Pacientes o solicitarlo al personal.

اگر آپ کو یہ کتابچہ اردو میں درکار ہے تو پیسٹ اپوائنٹمنٹ سینٹر یا عملے کے کسی رکن سے رابطہ قائم کریں۔

Mae'r daflen hon ar gael (ar gais), mewn print bras, ar dâp sain neu ar ddisg, ac efallai mewn ieithoedd eraill ar gais. Cysylltwch â chanolfan apwyntiadau cleifion i ofyn am gopi.

Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Liverpool Road
Chester
CH2 1UL
www.coch.nhs.uk