

Episiotomy & Perineal Tears

What is an episiotomy?

An episiotomy is a controlled cut to allow the vagina to be made wider to allow the baby to come through it more easily. An episiotomy will be sutured up after birth and they are often quite tender and swollen for a couple of weeks after birth.

What is a perineal tear?

A perineal tear is where the muscle and tissue between your vagina and anus tears during a vaginal delivery. There are 4 stages of perineal tearing and they are classified by which areas of the perineum are torn.

1st degree tear

Is a shallow skin tear of the perineum which may or may not need sutures

2nd degree tear

Is where there has been a tear to the perineal skin and muscle which generally heals better when it is sutured

3rd and 4th degree tears (also known as Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injuries)

A 3rd or 4th degree tear is where there is tearing the perineal skin, muscle and to the muscle of anal sphincter. Most women will require surgery and Pelvic Floor Rehab after a 3rd or 4th degree tear to ensure the anal sphincter muscle is repaired to prevent incontinence of the bowels.

How do I look after my sutures from my episiotomy or perineal tear?

1. Keep the area dry and as clean as possible to reduce risk of infection
 - Daily showers or sitz baths
 - Change your maternity pads regularly
2. Continue regular pain relief as directed by your Doctor or Midwife
3. Regular ice pack to perineum 10 minutes every 2-3 hours to help with swelling and pain relief
4. Avoid prolonged sitting to avoid pain and increased swelling
 - Try and alternate with side lying for feeds
 - Rest laying down
 - Prolonged sitting can cause pain, swelling and discomfort
5. Avoid heavy lifting for the first 6 weeks, nothing heavier than your newborn

6. Commence pelvic floor exercises

7. Avoid constipation and straining

- Pear and prune juice
- Aim for 2L of fluid per day
- Step under feet
- Apply pressure to your perineum when emptying your bowels, fold toilet paper up and apply pressure upwards to support the muscles and sutures

Can a Pregnancy and Pelvic Health Physio help me?

Absolutely!

If you have had a 3rd or 4th degree tear, I high recommend making an appointment at 6 weeks to for an assessment and rehabilitation plan.

Some women find that sex can be uncomfortable or painful after an episiotomy or perineal tear. I have a wide range of treatments that can help to breakdown scar tissue and promote healing which include; massage, therapeutic ultrasound and laser.

Is there anything I should look out for or be concerned about after an episiotomy or perineal tear?

- Sudden worsening of pain in the perineal area or pain that is persisting
- Red or swollen skin
- Pus or liquid discharge from the wound
- Unusual smell or odor

When can I have sex after a perineal tear or episiotomy?

It is important to wait until your wound has healed and you have had a follow up with your Midwife, Doctor and/or Obstetrician. This is usually around 6-8 weeks after birth.