

Preparing your Body for Birth

Birth is an amazing and wonderful experience whether you have a vaginal or caesarean delivery. I have some tips to help you maximize your birth experience, minimize pelvic floor trauma and promote tissue healing and recovery.

1. Start your pelvic floor exercises

- This will help to optimize your strength, endurance and pelvic floor muscle function, as well as give you an idea of what your pelvic floor felt like prior to birth.



How to contract your pelvic floor muscles?

- To contract your muscles the right way I suggest the following:
- Sitting down on a chair, feet and back well supported
- Let your belly relax
- Palms facing up
- Now imagine that you are trying to stop your wee, squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles
- If the muscles are being squeezed the right way, you should feel a very small movement of your vagina lifting up from the chair
- Try and hold for 2-3 seconds and then relax the muscles
- As you relax the muscles you should feel your vagina drop into the chair
- Repeat this 10 times once per day

2. Perineal massage

- Performing perineal massage from 35/36 weeks pregnant can help prepare your perineum for birth with the stretching and pushing during delivery. Perineal massage can help to reduce the risk of tearing during delivery.
- You only need to perform this once per day.

How to perform perineal massage

- Put a water-soluble lubricant, or natural oil like olive or coconut oil, on your thumbs and the perineum.
- Place thumbs just inside the vagina to a depth of three to five centimetres. Gently press downward towards the rectum and to the sides of the vagina at the same time to stretch the opening, until a very slight burning, stinging, or tingling sensation is felt.
- Work the lubricant in slowly and gently, maintaining the pressure and pulling the perineum forward a little as you sweep your thumbs from side to side of the vagina in a 'U' shaped motion for approximately two to five minutes.

- The massage can be done in one direction at a time i.e. from side to side, or the thumbs can be swept in opposite directions.
- Try different ways until you find which is more comfortable for you.
- Focus on relaxed breathing while trying to consciously relax the pelvic floor muscles and allowing the tissues to stretch.
- Relax and repeat once.

3. Practice pushing for labour

- When you are pushing in labour your pelvic floor muscles undergo a reflex contraction. It is important to be able to override this reflex contraction so you can get the baby out effectively whilst minimizing pelvic floor trauma.
- How to can an effective push?
- Take a big breath in and breathe out like your blowing candles
- Remember to try and keep your mouth open – mouth opens means that your pelvic floor is open and relaxed and therefore able to get the baby out

4. Get your pelvic floor assessed for your risk factors for pelvic floor dysfunction including prolapse

- A Pregnancy and Pelvic Health Physiotherapists can provide you with an individualized assessment to help identify risk factors for pelvic floor dysfunction.
- I find these are best done between 34-36 weeks, once your assessment has been performed I can provide you with your risks which you can discuss with your Maternity Care Provider should you wish to have a different birth plan to what you had previously discussed.