

KEEPING YOUR PERINEUM HEALTHY AND STRONG FOR BIRTH

- Discuss the details of crowning and birth with your midwife. Discuss some ways that you can avoid tearing and when an episiotomy is used.
- Visualize your baby crowning while you are pregnant. See your skin gently stretching, very supple and yielding. See your baby's head gently easing its way out of your body
- Eat a good diet with lots of vegetables, protein and water. Also be sure to eat enough fiber to avoid constipation, which may in turn lead to hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids will be painful during pushing.
- Wear cotton underwear. Oxygen will toughen and strengthen your sensitive skin (a good thing to remember when you have sore nipples from breastfeeding).
- During labor the midwife will place a warm compress directly on your perineum. Try to relax your pelvic area as much as possible while you are pushing. Relaxation will not only help with the actual birth, it will speed up the dilation of the cervix.
- Avoid the lithotomy, or laying on your back, position. You need the pressure of the baby's head to slowly stretch the skin, and the only way to get this pressure is from an upright position (squat, sit-squat, standing or hands and knees) or a side-lying position (rest your top leg on your midwife or your birth partner).
- Go slow on the second stage. If you feel any burning or stretching, slow down and blow. You will feel this regardless, but it is a good reminder to take it slow. Birthing slowly is best for you and your baby. Enjoy the power of pushing and carry it with you throughout your life.

HEALING AND CARE

If you do have a tear during your birth, here are a few things you can do to help soothe and heal your perineum.

- Extra vitamin C will help your body heal itself
- Extra fluids
- Gotu Kola (an herb) will help to lessen the pain and speed healing, follow manufacturers directions
- Sitz baths will increase circulation and speed healing as well as soothe discomfort. Adding comfrey, witch hazel or oatmeal to the bath is especially beneficial
- Make a tea out of comfrey and St. John's wort and soak gauze pads in it. Place the pads on your bottom
- If urinating is difficult or scary, it may be easier to take a peri bottle and pour lukewarm water over your pelvic area while you urinate. It also helps to urinate in a bathtub of water.

Information compiled by Laurie Fremgen, CPM from Herbal Healing for Women by Rosemary Gladstar and Earl Mindell's Herb Bible by Earl Mindell