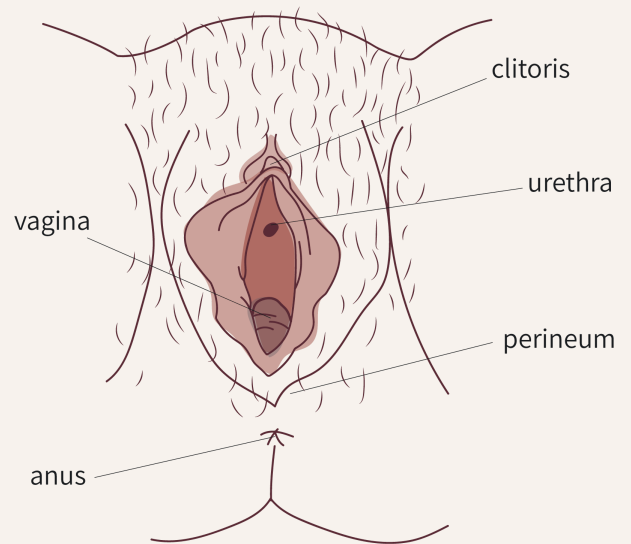


my body

taking care of your perineum

The **perineum** is the area between your vagina and your anus. This area stretches to make room for the baby to come out when you give birth. Sometimes the skin and/or muscles of the perineum will tear during birth - this is called a tear or laceration. If you had a tear and needed sutures (stitches), they will dissolve slowly over the course of several weeks and usually don't need any other care. Even without tears, your perineum and the muscles of your pelvis need time to heal after having a baby. Below are some ways you can help yourself heal.



Sitz baths

A “sitz bath” is a warm bath for your vulva, perineum, and bottom. Sitz baths can be done once or twice a day. They feel great and help you heal faster. To do a sitz bath:

1. Decide how you want to do your bath - you can either use a clean bathtub or a special sitz bath basin (bowl) that goes on your toilet (you can buy them at any drug store, or online). Either is fine, but some people like using a basin because it's much easier to clean than the bathtub.
2. Fill the tub or basin with warm water. If you are using the tub, the water should be deep enough to reach your hips. You can add Epsom salts, witch hazel, or both to the water.
3. Soak for 20 minutes and then gently pat dry with a clean towel or washcloth that you use only for this purpose.

Medications and herbs

Numbing sprays, creams, and ointments can help with tenderness and stinging. Creams and ointments can be put right onto your pad or disposable underwear. Numbing sprays come in cans and can be sprayed directly onto your vulva and perineum. Witch hazel and epsom salts can be added to a sitz bath (see above) to help you heal. You can pour witch hazel into pads and store them in the fridge for cool, comforting relief for your perineum.

Arnica is an herbal medication that helps the body heal from swelling and bruising. It can be bought online or at health food stores. Arnica comes in creams, ointments, and small pills that dissolve under your tongue. In this situation it is better to use the pill form. It is safe to take Arnica pills when breast/chestfeeding. Follow the dosage instructions on the bottle.

Ventilation!

After giving birth, you will be wearing pads and may be using ointments, creams, or sprays on your vulva and perineum. All those things help with healing, but they also make it hard for your vulva and perineum to get fresh air. When you are able to spend some time sitting or lying down, put a clean thick towel under you to catch any bleeding and sit on the towel with no underwear or pad on. You can put a sheet or thin clothing over your lap to cover up if that is most comfortable, just be sure that it is thin and loose enough to allow for good airflow.


Peeing comfortably

If you are having stinging on your vulva or perineum when you pee, using a squeezable water bottle or **peri bottle** can help. Most of the time the hospital will give you this bottle. Fill your bottle with clean warm water before you pee. Spray the water towards your urethra while you pee to prevent stinging and then over your vulva after you are done.

Pooping comfortably

It can feel very uncomfortable to pass hard stools when your perineum is sore! Constipation also makes hemorrhoids worse, and most people develop hemorrhoids at some point in pregnancy.

Try to prevent constipation by drinking plenty of water and increasing the fiber in your diet by eating a lot of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. You can also try one of these medications—make sure to take them with a full glass of water:

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- Methylcellulose fiber (Citrucel®)
 - Psyllium (Fiberall®, Metamucil®)
 - Polycarbophil (FiberCon®)
 - Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®)

Unfortunately, hemorrhoids don't usually go away completely. But they do get smaller and less uncomfortable. If you have hemorrhoids, really try to avoid constipation and straining - these will make your hemorrhoids get worse. For comfort and to help the hemorrhoids start getting smaller, you can take sitz baths (see instructions above) with witch hazel in the water. Other medications that might help include:

- Phenylephrine/mineral oil/petrolatum (Preparation H®)
- Witch hazel (Tucks® pads or ointment)

When to reach out

The vulva and perineum usually heal without problems - it is normal to have a tear when giving birth, and so that part of your body was made to heal quickly. Infections and other problems are very rare, but they can happen. Please reach out to your midwife team right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Severe pain in your vulva or perineum
- Open areas where sutures are coming apart
- Foul-smelling fluid around your sutures
- Green/yellow fluid around your sutures
- Redness or heat around your sutures
- Severe constipation (unable to poop for 3 days)
- Severe bleeding or pain from hemorrhoids
- Fever greater than 100.4 F