



Episiotomy



When you are giving birth, the opening of the vagina and perineum (the skin between the vagina and anus) stretches to allow the baby to be born.

An episiotomy is a small diagonal cut made with scissors through the perineum by a midwife or doctor. They will discuss this with you during the birth if they think it may be of benefit.

When might this be recommended?

- If your baby is showing signs of fetal distress because of an abnormal heart rate pattern and needs to be born quickly.
- If there are signs that you may sustain a more severe tear involving the anal sphincter. An episiotomy may allow more space for the baby to be born and prevent such a tear occurring.
- If you are going to have an assisted birth with a ventouse (vacuum) or forceps.
- If you have a serious health condition and it has been recommended to shorten the duration of second stage or 'pushing'.

How is it performed?

Before an episiotomy, your midwife or doctor will discuss the procedure with you and ask for your consent.

Local anaesthetic is injected into the perineum to numb the area so that you will not feel any pain. If you have an epidural, you may not need local anaesthetic. The midwife or doctor will then make a small diagonal cut from the bottom of the entrance to the vagina directed down and out to one side.

Following the birth of your baby, the midwife or doctor will examine the perineum to check for any other trauma to the area. The cut will then be stitched together using dissolvable stitches.

What can I do to help my recovery after an episiotomy?

It can take up to six weeks for your episiotomy to heal and during this time you may have mild to moderate pain. Talk to your midwife, doctor or GP about pain relief options.

Doing the following will help with your recovery:

- Keep the area clean and dry: have a shower at least once a day and change your pad regularly. Wash your hands before and after touching the area to reduce the risk of infection.
- You may find it more comfortable to pour warm water over the outer area of the vagina as you urinate to prevent the stinging sensation of urine passing over your stitches.
- Drink at least 2-3 litres of water every day and eat a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables to prevent you from becoming constipated. If you become constipated, discuss options with your midwife or GP.
- Place an ice pack wrapped in a towel or cloth onto the area to relieve pain and swelling for ten minutes at a time.
- Avoid sitting for long periods of time. You may find it helpful to lie on your side when you are resting or feeding your baby. You can also try sitting on a pillow.
- Start pelvic floor muscle exercises as soon as you can to increase blood circulation to the area and help with the healing process.

Worried or concerned?

You should contact your midwife, doctor or GP if:

- Your stitches become more painful, more swollen or are bleeding excessively.
- You notice any smelly discharge coming from the wound - this can be a sign of infection.
- You cannot control your bowels.

Birth Unit Contact Information

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Your local GP



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