

## Pelvic floor exercises

Commence pelvic floor exercises as soon as you can after birth.

You can do this lying, sitting or standing:

- Relax your thighs, buttocks and tummy muscles
- Imagine trying to lift and squeeze your vagina up inside as if you are trying to stop the flow of urine or the passage of wind (keep the rest of your body still)
- Aim to hold for 1-5 seconds while breathing normally then let go and relax for 5 seconds
- Repeat this action 5-10 times (one set) and do at least 3-5 sets a day.

Stop exercising when your muscles feel tired.

Initially the area may feel weak or numb, but this will improve with practice.

Also lift and squeeze your pelvic floor muscles every time you lift, cough or sneeze.

**Pelvic floor exercises should be part of your daily routine from now onwards!**

## Follow-up

While most tears heal completely and bowel function returns to normal, occasionally some women have ongoing problems.

You will be offered a follow-up appointment at 6-12 weeks to check on how well your stitches are healing and to offer you advice if you are still having problems.

The obstetrician will also discuss with you any concerns that you may have such as future delivery options.

If you experience any problems before you return for your follow-up appointment talk to your obstetrician, midwife or GP/doctor who will refer you to the Womens Health Physiotherapist

## Your Physiotherapist is

---

**Phone:**

---



# Third and Fourth Degree Tears during Childbirth

---

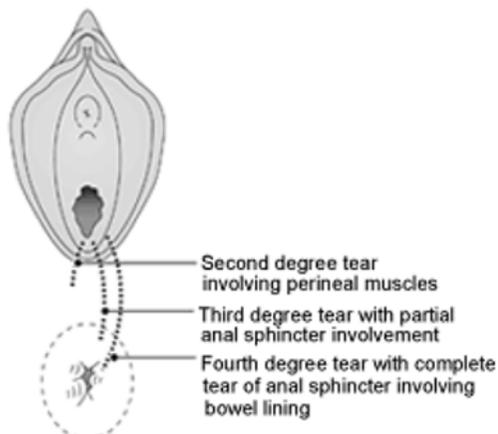
*What you need to know*

---

## What is a third or fourth degree tear?

Many women will experience a tear to their vagina and perineum during childbirth. For a few women the tear can be more severe and can extend to the back passage (anus). Tears are graded in severity from 1 to 4. Grade 3 and 4 tears start at the vagina and go through to the anus.

- 1st degree – skin affected
- 2nd degree – skin and perineal muscle
- 3rd degree – muscle extending to the anus
- 4th degree – muscle, anus and bowel



## How will this affect me?

For most women a third or fourth degree tear will heal well without problems. However, because the anus is the muscle that controls when you open your bowels, you may experience some of the following problems: uncontrolled farting, bowel incontinence, an inability to “hold on” when you need to open your bowels. These symptoms are most likely to be temporary but sometimes they can last longer.

## How do I look after my stitches?

Your tear will be stitched by a specialist.

It is important to:

- Take your pain relief regularly and tell staff if you are in pain
- Apply an ice pack to your stitches for 5 minutes every 2-3 hours for the first 2 days to reduce swelling
- Lie on your side or tummy with a pillow under your hips to help reduce swelling
- Sit up straight in a chair on rolled towels or a ring cushion
- Take laxatives to avoid constipation (aim for a soft easily passed stool at least 3 times a week)

- When going to the toilet, place your feet on a footstool, lean forward and bulge out your abdomen. Don't strain



- After using the toilet clean your stitches with warm water from a hand held shower on low pressure or a wet flannel, and pat dry with toilet paper
- Avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby for 3 months
- Avoid high impact exercise and prolonged standing for 6-8 weeks
- Wait to have sex until your stitches have healed and when you feel comfortable (usually 4-6 weeks).

## Taking care of your pelvic floor

Your pelvic floor is a hammock of muscles in the base of your pelvis. These muscles hold your bladder, womb and bowel in place. Exercising your pelvic floor and keeping it strong prevents incontinence. It can also help with healing.