

Your Health After Pregnancy: Pelvic Floor and Perineal Tears



Pelvic floor issues related to giving birth are common. There are many treatment options to help with perineal tears and pelvic floor problems.

Somewhere between 60 to 70% of people who give birth experience some degree of tearing in the skin or the muscles between the vagina and anus. Sometimes, these injuries can lead to other issues like leaking urine or stool by accident. Even though these issues are common, many of us are not comfortable talking about them.

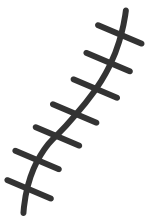


Jon Pennycuff, MD, MSPH
Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
UW School of Medicine and Public Health



What is a perineal tear?

The perineum is the area of skin, muscle, and tissue between the vagina and the anus. This part of the body helps support your pelvic organs and helps control your bladder and bowel movements. Perineal tears, also known as perineal lacerations, are tears to the skin and muscle of the perineum. These tears can commonly happen when someone is giving birth.



Are there different types of perineal tears?

Perineal tears are grouped by severity. First and second-degree tears are the most common. Only about 2-4 percent of people experience third and fourth-degree tears.

- **First degree tears** are the least severe. First degree tears involve the skin and tissue right beneath the skin. First degree tears may not require stitches. If they do require stitches, the repair can often be done in the delivery room.
- **Second degree tears** involve skin and muscle in the perineum. These tears often require stitches, which can usually be done in the delivery room.
- **Third degree tears** are more severe. Third degree tears involve skin and muscle in the perineum, and some tearing of the muscles that surround the anus, called the anal sphincter. These tears may need to be repaired by a specialized surgeon in an operating room.
- **Fourth degree tears** involve skin and muscle in the perineum, and tears through the anal sphincter and into the rectum. These tears may need to be repaired by a specialized surgeon in an operating room.

Listen to **Fourth Trimester: Perineal Tears** to learn more.

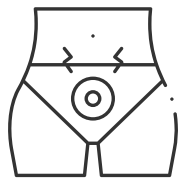


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How long do perineal tears take to heal?

Healing from a tear is different for every person. For some people with very minor injuries, they may feel back to normal within six weeks after delivery. For people with more severe injuries, they may need several months to feel better. It is normal to need more time after giving birth to heal.



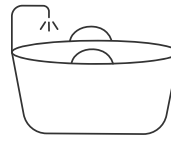
Are there long-term side effects from perineal tearing?

Most people with first and second-degree tearing heal well with few side effects. It is more common for people with third and fourth-degree tearing to have some pelvic floor problems moving forward, including leaking urine or stool when you don't want to, pelvic pain, pain with sex, or slow healing.



Is someone who had one perineal tear more likely to have perineal tears in future births?

If someone experienced a perineal tear in their first delivery, they have a 5-8% chance of experiencing a tear in future deliveries. You can talk with your OB provider about your risks.



What are the treatment options for perineal tears and pelvic floor issues?

There are many options available to help people recover from perineal tears. You can discuss these options with your OB provider or a specialist in urogynecology.

Options you can do at home:

- Dietary changes to prevent constipation
- Hot packs or ice packs
- Sitz baths (sitting in warm water bath to relax pelvic floor muscles)
- Pain medications

Clinical options:

- Pelvic floor physical therapy (exercises to train or strengthen your pelvic floor muscle systems)
- Vaginal estrogen, a medication that can help with vaginal dryness or irritation, pain with sex, and wound healing
- Surgeries to reduce scarring, reduce pain, or help improve incontinence



More Resources

UW Health Integrated Specialty Care for Women – uwhealth.org/iscw

Pelvic Floor Health Guide – *American Urogynecologic Society*
<https://go.wisc.edu/3p9awu>

Third and Fourth-Degree Perineal Tears – *American Urogynecologic Society*
<https://go.wisc.edu/dyers7>

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy – *UW Department of Ob-Gyn Women's Health*
<https://go.wisc.edu/8tur4f>