

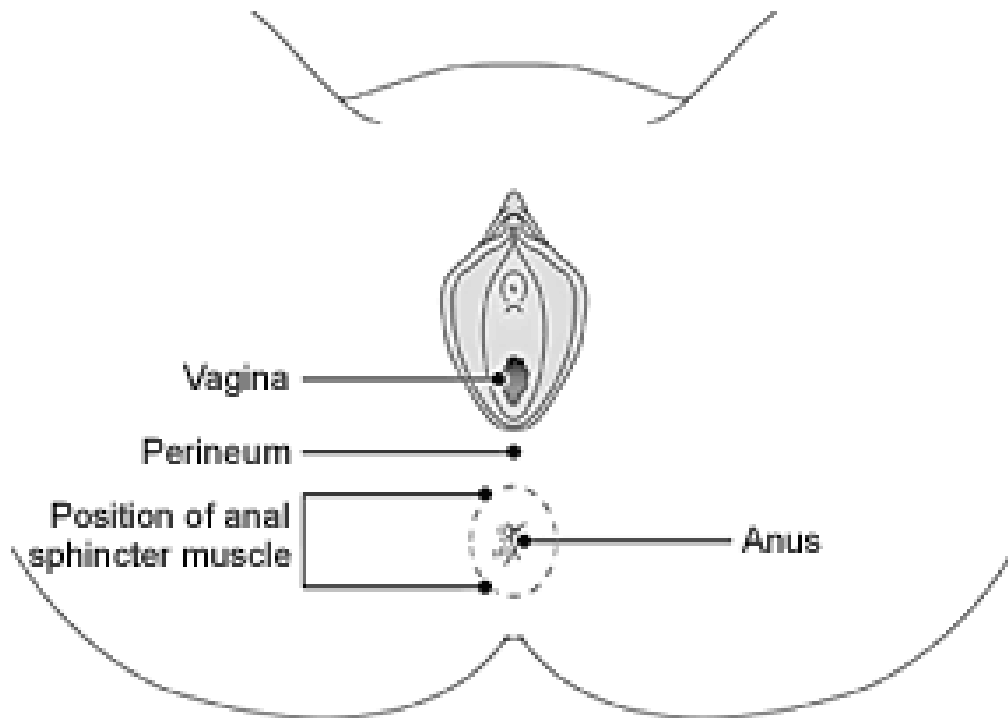
Physiotherapy

Anal Sphincter tears in Childbirth

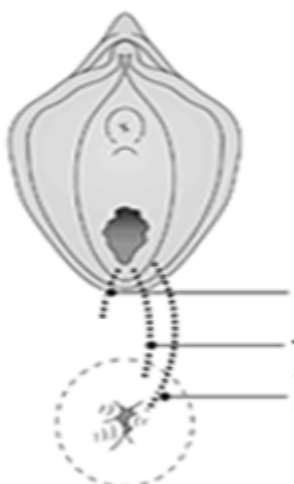
It is common to experience vaginal tears when giving birth. Most tears only involve skin and muscles of the perineum (first and second degree tears). Tears that involve the anal sphincter muscles are less common and require specific follow up.

Third or fourth degree anal sphincter tears

Third and fourth degree tears extend through the perineum into the anal sphincter muscles which surround the bowel (back passage). A third degree tear is partial or complete tearing of the anal sphincters. A fourth degree tear involves the anal sphincters and also the bowel lining.



Pictures from www.thewomens.org.au



Second degree tears involving perineal muscles

Third degree tears with partial anal sphincter involvement

Fourth degree tears with complete tear of anal sphincter involving bowel lining

Third and fourth degree tears are sutured/stitched by an experienced doctor using a specialised technique shortly after birth. Sometimes it is necessary to do this in the operating theatre under a general or spinal anaesthetic.

Most third and fourth degree tears will heal completely and normal bladder and bowel control returns. However, in a minority of cases there is altered function to the back passage (such as inability to control wind or bowel movements).

Recovering from your tear

Looking after your stitches:

The stitches used to repair your tear are dissolvable and should begin healing in the first few weeks after birth (approximately 2-3 weeks). It is important that you keep your stitches clean and dry during the time it takes for them to heal.

To keep your perineum clean:

- Have at least one shower a day – preferably after opening your bowels.
- Gently pat your stitches dry with a clean towel, from front to back.
- Avoid using any antiseptic washes, creams, or lotions until the stitches have fully healed.
- Sexual intercourse or water-based exercise is not advised during the healing period.

Managing pain and swelling:

Ice packs can assist in the reduction of pain and swelling of your perineum. Place an ice pack into a sanitary pad and apply for up to 20 minutes every 2-3 hours during the day for the first two to three days, or until the swelling subsides.

To reduce the pressure on your stitches and pelvic floor muscles:

- Try resting in a lying down position at regular intervals during the day.
- Get out of bed from a side-ways position.
- Limit your time sitting if this is uncomfortable for your stitches.
- Heavy lifting including lifting toddlers, shopping bags and full washing baskets puts more pressure on your stitches and should be avoided.
- Avoid any high impact exercise/activities that will increase the strain on your pelvic floor.

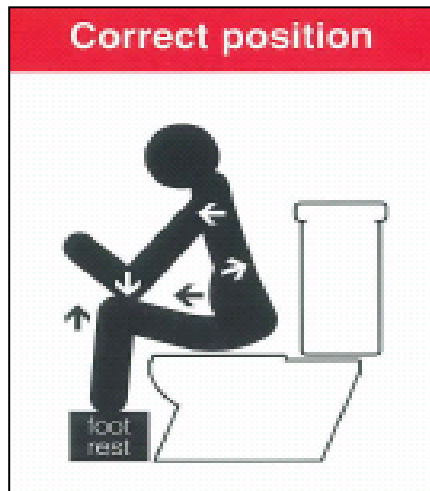
Managing your bowels:

It is very important to avoid constipation (hard stools) and straining when going to the toilet, especially while your stitches are healing.

To prevent constipation:

- You will be given stool softeners to help prevent firm stool and we suggest that you continue to take these stool softeners regularly as your stitches heal.
- You should also drink plenty of fluids (2 – 3 litres per day)
- Eat foods high in fibre, especially fruit and vegetables.

Using the correct position when sitting on the toilet will help you to empty your bowel fully



- Knees higher than hips
- Lean forwards and put elbows on your knees
- Bulge out your abdomen
- Straighten your spine

Take your time to go, don't rush. You may also find some gentle support to your stitches (with a pad or toilet paper) will help you to relax the pelvic floor muscles fully and be more comfortable.

Pelvic floor exercises

Pelvic floor exercises help to stimulate blood supply to the perineum which is important for healing – they will not break or damage your stitches. Pelvic floor exercises are also important in long term recovery as the pelvic floor muscles assist in controlling wind and bowel motions. Pelvic floor exercises can safely be started 1-2 days after the birth of your baby. Begin these exercises when comfort allows, in a lying down position. For further information on pelvic floor exercises please talk to your physiotherapist.

OASIS Clinic

You will be offered appointments in the Obstetric Anal Sphincter Injuries (OASIS) clinic at Canberra Hospital where a gynaecologist and physiotherapist monitor your recovery and discuss any concerns you have. Please see overleaf for further information regarding the OASIS clinic and your appointment details.

My OASIS Clinic Appointments:

First Clinic Appointment: _____

Maternity and Gynaecology outpatients, Level 2, Building 11, Centenary Hospital for Women and Children

Second Clinic Appointment: _____

Maternity and Gynaecology outpatients, Level 2, Building 11, Centenary Hospital for Women and Children

Your first visit to the OASIS clinic

- Will be with the **physiotherapist**, usually within 2- 3 weeks of giving birth.
- This is to monitor your recovery and any bowel or bladder issues you may be experiencing. It is a good time to ask any questions you may have about your recovery.
- The physiotherapist will examine your perineum to make sure that stitches are healing well and that there is no sign of infection or skin breakdown.
- She will also observe you doing pelvic floor exercises to ensure that you are doing them correctly. This is very important for the recovery of your repair and long term pelvic floor muscle rehabilitation.

Your second visit to the OASIS clinic

- This is usually 6-8 weeks post-natal and is with the **gynaecologist and physiotherapist**.
- The gynaecologist will examine your perineum. They will also examine your back passage to monitor the healing of the sphincter muscles.
- The physiotherapist will also perform a vaginal examination to determine the strength of your pelvic floor muscles.
- It is a good time to ask any questions you have about your tear or future pregnancies.

If you are unable to attend your scheduled OASIS clinic appointments, please contact the Maternity and Gynaecology clinic on **6174 762**

*For further information regarding your recovery please contact the physiotherapy department on **6244 2154***

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues as accessible as possible. If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format such as large print, please phone 13 22 81 or email HealthACT@act.gov.au

If you are Deaf, or have a speech or hearing impairment and need the teletypewriter service, please phone 13 36 77 and ask for 13 22 81.

For speak and listen users, please phone 1300 555 727 and ask for 13 22 81. For more information on these services visit <http://www.relayservice.com.au>

If English is not your first language and you require the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), please call 13 14 50.



© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra, **September 2015**

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the Territory Records Office, Community and Infrastructure Services, Territory and Municipal Services, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra City ACT 2601.

Enquiries about this publication should be directed to ACT Government Health Directorate, Communications and Marketing Unit, GPO Box 825 Canberra City ACT 2601 or email: HealthACT@act.gov.au

www.health.act.gov.au | www.act.gov.au

Enquiries: Canberra 13ACT1 or 132281