

# I'LL TAKE CARE OF MY PERINEUM.

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## **A little history**

Western medicine has only recently become interested in the function of the perineum, and even more recent is the interest in its rehabilitation and protection.

Recently, reconstructive surgery was the only alternative when problems appeared.

It was only in 1984 that perineal rehabilitation was given pride of place in Europe, while here on the American continent, there was still no mention of education or prevention.

The only preventive proposal during childbirth was episiotomy.

The fact that the perineum is still considered as a «taboo area» does not work in favor of this knowledge, let alone education. It is surprising that nowadays, many women discover this part of their bodily intimacy during their first pregnancy during prenatal sessions.

In Europe, education and perineal rehabilitation have been the subject of special care for almost 30 years now, integrated into the traditional pre- and post-natal care.

Fortunately, this interest has now been present on our continent for about ten years.

It involves people trained in this type of work (physiotherapists, doctors, nurses, specialized yoga teachers, etc.), motivated by bodywork, and having a good perception of their own bodies, which implies personal work. This is indeed crucial since it has been proven that urinary incontinence problems can be caused in 35% of cases by poorly adapted post-natal gymnastics sessions.

We are therefore lifting the veil on a problem that is modestly hidden by women, but fortunately identified by health professionals, who are committed to preventing, educating and rehabilitating women during the perinatal period or even later.

We know that 80% of pelvic floor disorders in women are inherent to pregnancy and childbirth. And since we also know that a good education or rehabilitation by professionals accredited for this purpose can positively and drastically change the social and intimate life of 3 out of 4 women, we encourage you to consult during the prenatal and post-natal period.

Dear perineum, who are you? Where are you?

The perineum, to describe it very schematically, is the muscle hammock that closes our abdomen from below. It is located between the pubis, the lateral ischia, the coccyx behind and contains 3 openings from back to front: the anus, the vagina, and the urethra.

The back of the pelvic floor is the thickest, more toned and stronger than the front. The anus must hold the stools, while the urethra is thinner and more adequate to manage urine fluctuations. Many muscles cross and intertwine from front to back, from one side to the other, superficial, deep, sphincter level... Very schematically and without going into the details of an anatomy class about it, it is important to visualize it and perceive it in its entirety.

Some people call «perineum» the only small part between the vagina and the anus. It is precisely this one that will be relaxed, stretched and distended when the baby passes through. It is therefore reintegrated into the entire pelvic floor that it is interesting to educate or re-educate.

## **What is perineal education?**

It would not be crazy to teach little girls (and little boys, for that matter, because incontinence also concerns men through anal incontinence) to locate their pe-

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rineum, to become aware of it and to lock it during intense efforts (coughing, carrying loads, changing positions, sports, laughing, climbing stairs...)

It should be remembered that 60% of female Olympic athletes suffer from urinary incontinence when practicing their discipline and that 13% of teenage girls are also incontinent in physical education classes. Yet both are still young and have not given birth. This shows how poorly this area of the body is protected and deserves attention.

## Perineum, oh perineum, what can I do to get to know you?

### 1) LOCATE YOUR PERINEUM

Sitting on a chair, leaning with the forearms on the thighs (to release the perineum from the weight of the abdominal muscles), contract the perineum like this:

- A little bit
- A little bit +
- as much as possible

Hold for a few seconds and release:

- a little bit
- a little bit +
- absolutely

The image of the elevator going up from the ground floor to the 3rd floor, then down after a few seconds can help you. This exercise can be completed by further relaxing by lowering the elevator to the (-1) basement.

This same awareness can be done lying on your back, legs bent, feet on the ground.

2) Once this awareness is integrated, in the same position to begin with, integrate breathing into it.

- lock the perineum (=maximum contraction)
- exhale while maintaining the contraction
- at the end of expiration, release the contraction and inhale
- repeat this sequence for a few breaths without shortness of breath



- to increase the effect of this exercise, intensify the contraction throughout the exhalation, or again, extend the exhalation.

**CAUTION:** It is important to create a rhythm with your breathing so that the perineum has time to contract and relax in its entirety (in the entirety of the tissues and in all its thickness, i.e. +/- 5 seconds)

On the other hand, if you feel that the perineum relaxes in the middle of the exhalation, stop the exercise and return to the first one.

### If you have any difficulty locating your perineum, here are some «little tricks»:

1) Try to stop (or slow down if stopping is not possible) urine when urinating. Do it only once and in the middle of the urination (at first the flow rate is too high, at the end you might stop the urination and keep urine in the bladder).

2) Sitting comfortably, leaning back against cushions, legs bent and spread, soles of the feet against each other. Choose a quiet time in a place where you will not be disturbed. Place your hand flat on the pelvic floor (heel of the hand near the pubis, fingertips

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towards the coccyx). Contract the perineum, according to the previous instructions; your hand will give you a sensation even if you do not yet feel the contraction of your perineum through it well.

3) In the same position, but this time without clothes, place a small mirror in front of you and repeat the same contraction. Here you will have visual confirmation of what you are doing.

4) Lying on your back, knees bent and feet rested:

- Lock the perineum
- Exhale by pushing against the floor or carpet with the lumbar region (tilting of the pelvis), keeping the contraction of the perineum throughout the exercise;
- Release at the end of exhalation and inhale.
- Repeat a few times according to the rhythm of your breathing.

Now that the perineum is well located, it is more interesting in the context of a good perineal education, to work on it: in different positions, in movement, in gravity, because it is in everyday life that the pelvic floor must be able to respond to the demands.

Repeat exercises 1, 2 and 3 to relearn the sensation in different positions and situations:

- Lying on your back. Feet against a wall
- On all fours
- standing with your back against a wall
- standing without support (in a lineup for example)
- by walking
- sitting on your heels
- by going up the stairs
- lying on one side, head supported by one hand
- sitting in a car (at a traffic light for example)....

The more you resist the air outlet by pinching the lips as you exhale, the more you stimulate the contraction of the abdominals and thereby increase the contraction of the perineum.

5) While standing, place one hand on the lower abdomen (just above the pubic bone)

- Lock the pelvic floor
- Exhale quickly and strongly by contracting the abdominals in jerks until the lungs are empty.

6) Since the pelvic floor and the thoracic diaphragm are in synergy (these 2 diaphragms are parallel), be aware of your rib cage, closed at the bottom by the thoracic or respiratory diaphragm, just like the perineum that closes the abdomen.

To become aware of this, sit comfortably on cushions, bent legs, knees apart, soles of the feet against each other. Place your hands flat on the edge of the rib cage, and breathe deeply, paying attention to its movements. As you inhale, the ribs widen and rise, as you exhale, they tighten and descend. Once this awareness is achieved, continue without the help of your hands and accentuate the movement of your ribs.

Thirdly, try to mobilize your rib cage according to the same parameters but this time independently of your breathing.

When this has become easy for you, add the contraction of the perineum and compare the degree of ease of this contraction according to the position of the chest diaphragm, i.e., diaphragm up and ribs apart or diaphragm down and ribs tight.

You have become an expert in the «art of perineal education». As you have understood, this is an excellent way to prepare for the birth of your baby, but a wonderful prevention to keep your pelvic floor healthy (less episiotomies and perineal tearing after proper preparation). Moreover, your sex life, as you might expect, will be all renewed.