



# 5 Tips to Prevent Tearing in Labour



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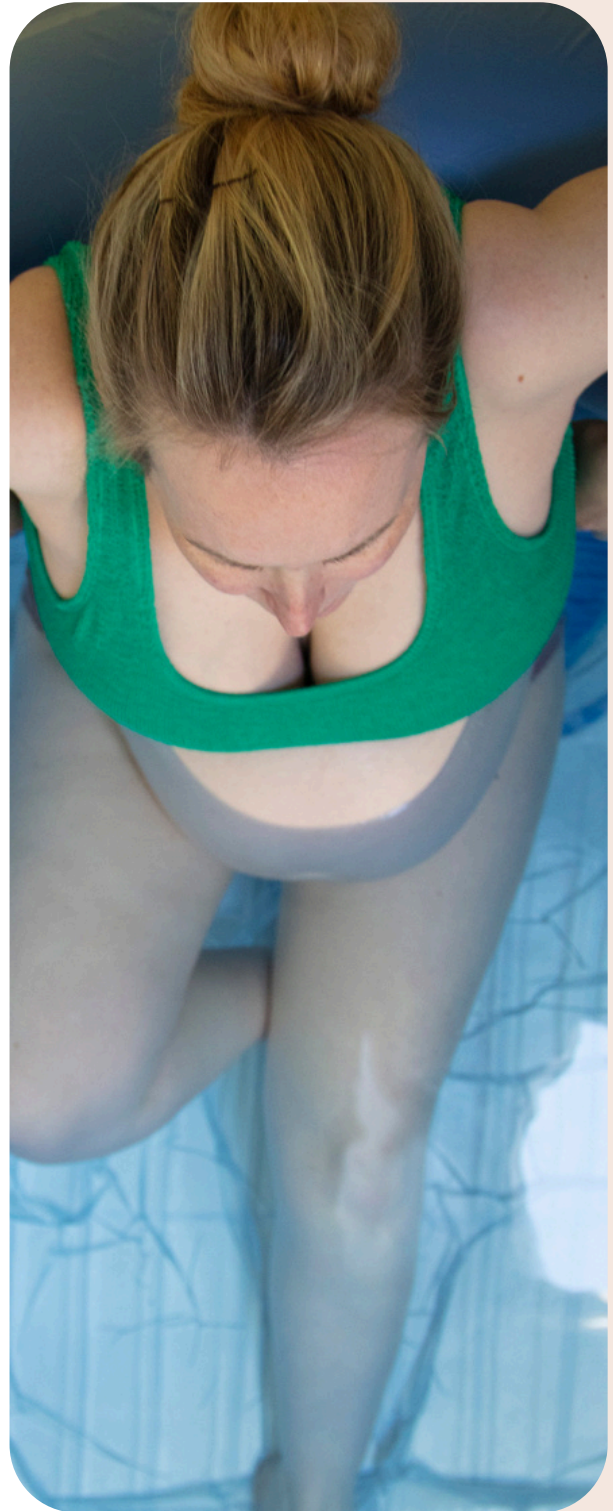
Hypnatal Birthing

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# WHAT EXACTLY IS TEARING?

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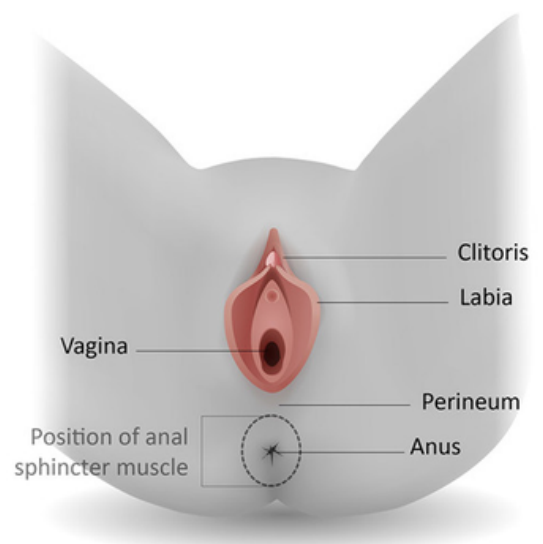
Let's start off by saying that some degree of tearing is very common for women giving birth vaginally. It is also one of the most common fears I hear from clients when I am teaching my antenatal hypnobirthing courses. So, rest assured it is completely normal if you are feeling worried or anxious about this!

Tearing occurs when the vagina or area between the vagina and anus (the perineum) is stretched during a vaginal delivery. Tears can also happen inside the vagina or other parts of the vulva, including the labia. You may also hear tearing referred to as 'perineal lacerations' or 'perineal tears'.

According to the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (RCOG) up to 9 out of 10 first time mothers will experience some sort of tear, graze or episiotomy (if having a vaginal birth). For the majority of women, these tears are minor and will heal very quickly.

But, you'll be glad to hear there are some things you can do to reduce the chance of this happening.

Keep reading to find out more...



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# WHY DO TEARS OCCUR?

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Tears happen spontaneously as your baby stretches the vagina and perineum during vaginal birth. When it stretches the area can potentially become damaged due to a graze, tear or bruising.

There are many factors that can impact the chance of a tear occurring:

- speed of delivery
- baby's size
- first baby
- position of baby during delivery
- coached pushing vs waiting for fetal ejection reflex
- prolonged pushing / second stage of labour
- assisted delivery via forceps / ventouse
- shoulder dystocia (baby's shoulder becomes stuck behind pubic bone)

# WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF TEAR?



First, let's look at the different types of tear that can occur during a vaginal birth:

## 1st Degree

Small, skin-deep tears.  
Normally heal on their own.

## 2nd Degree

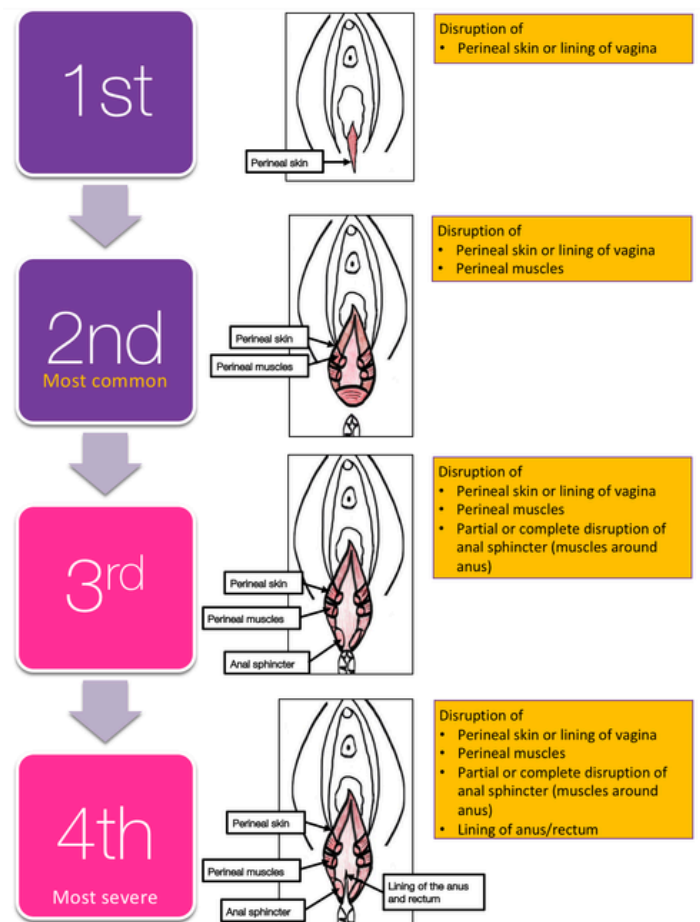
Deeper tear affecting the perineal muscles.  
Usually needs stitches to heal.  
About 3 / 10 women will have a 1st/2nd degree tear.

## 3rd Degree

Tear that involves the muscle that controls the anus (anal sphincter).  
Needs stitches in theatre with anaesthetic.

## 4th Degree

A tear that goes further into the lining of the anus / bowel.  
Needs stitches in theatre with anaesthetic.



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# WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TEAR AND AN EPISIOTOMY?

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A tear happens spontaneously as baby stretches the perineum. An episiotomy is a cut made by a healthcare provider to your perineum and vaginal wall to make the vagina wider and make more space for baby to be born, allowing them to be born more easily or quickly. Sometimes an episiotomy can extend and become a deeper tear.

Why might an episiotomy be recommended?

- if baby needs to be born quickly due to a concern i.e. raised heart rate
- during assisted delivery (forceps / ventouse)
- if you are at risk of serious tearing
- to create more space for baby to be delivered
- if baby's shoulder becomes stuck behind the pubic bone (shoulder dystocia)

An episiotomy must only be performed with your consent, so make sure you understand what the procedure is, the benefits / risks of having it vs not having it, and any alternatives i.e. changing position. If you are unsure always ask questions.

Before having the episiotomy you will have an injection of local anaesthetic into the muscle to numb the area. Stitches are put in after your baby is born to help repair the area - these will dissolve over the next 2-4 weeks.

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# 5 Ways to Prevent Tearing in Childbirth

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- 1 Perineal massage** during pregnancy from 34 weeks can really help to stretch the perineum to prepare for birth. Ideally do this somewhere quiet, maybe after a bath when you and your perineum are all relaxed! Practicing this gets you used to the feeling of the skin stretching, so it is less of a shock when baby is being born!
- 2 Position:** certain positions will reduce the pressure on the perineum during birth, to help control the delivery of baby's head. Positions include kneeling, on all fours or lying on your side. Upright, forward leaning and open (UFO) is the best position to be in. I love talking about different positions in my courses, as often people don't realise how many there are!
- 3 Hypnobirthing** helps you stay calm and relaxed during birth, especially the 'pushing' stage, leading to a more gentle birth and allowing time for the tissues to stretch gradually and carefully. Breathing techniques, visualisations and powerful affirmations can really help; these are all techniques and tools I teach in my courses.
- 4 Water** in labour and delivery (bath/shower) can help soften the vagina and perineal tissues to stretch more easily. Water also helps your body relax, reducing any tension you may experience, and therefore reducing pain and chance of tearing - all things I cover in my birth prep course!
- 5 Listen to your body** and await spontaneous delivery, trust your instincts, listen to your body and go with it. Avoiding coached / forced pushing helps the perineum stretch gradually. Listening to your body in the second stage of labour allows your body to rest when needed, allowing for a more gentle delivery. Allow your baby to emerge on their own, slowly and gently. This allows the skin, tissue and muscles to stretch slowly, reducing the chance of tearing.



**YOU'VE GOT THIS -  
BELIEVE YOU CAN  
AND YOU ARE  
HALFWAY THERE**



Ready to start your antenatal & hypnobirthing education with me? Get in touch!



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