

What is an Episiotomy?

An episiotomy is an incision made by your provider that widens the opening of the vagina for childbirth. It can be 1- to 3-inch long (2 to 4 cm). The episiotomy helps prevent tearing (laceration) of the vaginal wall during the delivery of the baby. It is often given to women when the doctor believes that you may tear or during forceps and breech (the baby coming out feet or bottom first) delivery. The decision about whether to have an episiotomy cannot be made until delivery. If your health care provider decides that an episiotomy is necessary, she will discuss it with you right before delivery.

During the procedure your health care provider will numb the area of the vaginal opening with an anesthetic. This will not be necessary if you already received a block for pain or an epidural catheter. After you deliver your baby, the health care provider will stitch the incision. The stitches will not need to be removed. They will slowly dissolve after about 10 days.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

The benefits of an episiotomy are:

- It may prevent tearing of the area between your vagina and rectum.
- It may shorten the second stage of labor by relieving muscle tightness in this area.
- It may prevent stretching of your vagina or pelvic relaxation later in life (a condition in which the structures that support your bladder and rectum are weakened).
- It may prevent injury to the baby if the baby's head is too large, the shoulders are too wide, or you are having a breech birth

What are the risks of this procedure?

Some of the risks are:

- increased blood loss
- Poor healing or infection of the incision
- Pain after delivery
- swelling
- Discomfort from the scar.

What happens after the procedure?

The incision should heal quickly, but you may have some pain and swelling.

This can be relieved by:

- Cloth-covered ice packs on the area of the cut to reduce swelling and pain
- warm sitz baths 2 or 3 times a day for 10 minutes to help with the soreness (starting at least 24 hours after delivery)
- Sprays or pads that contain a numbing medicine
- Pain medicine (such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen).
- Do not resume sexual intercourse until your health care provider says is OK.

When should I call my health care provider?

The episiotomy should feel better and hurt less each day. Call your health care provider if:

- The pain and swelling do not get better.
- You have an increase in discharge from the vagina.
- You have a fever over 100°F (37.8°C).

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