You have been given this factsheet because during the birth of your baby, you have experienced injury to your vagina and perineum. Your perineum is the area between your vagina and rectum (also referred to as your back passage). This injury has also involved the muscles around the rectum (the internal and external anal sphincter muscles) and may have involved the rectum itself.

A tear involving the external anal sphincter (EAS) muscle is known as a third degree tear. A tear involving the sphincter muscles and the rectum is known as a fourth degree tear (see diagram below).

**Third degree tears are labelled according to the extent of the injury:**

- 3a is a tear involving less than 50% of the EAS muscle
- 3b is a tear involving more than 50% of the EAS muscle
- 3c is a tear involving the whole of the EAS muscle and the internal anal sphincter muscle

A fourth degree is a tear involving the rectal mucosa (lining of the bowel).

**The position of a third and fourth degree tear**
Nationally up to 9% (nine in 100) of women are reported to have experienced a third or fourth degree perineal tear.

The likelihood of you having a third or fourth degree tear is increased if:
- this is your first vaginal birth
- your baby is born facing upwards
- your perineum (the distance between your vaginal opening and anus) is short
- you need help with the birth by forceps or ventouse
- you have a large baby
- you have a long labour
- you have an episiotomy (a surgical cut in your perineum used to enlarge the opening of your vagina to help with the birth of your baby) as this can extend into a third or fourth degree tear.

Treatment of third and fourth degree tears
A third or fourth degree tear requires precise surgery to repair it. The repair is done in an operating theatre and is usually performed under an epidural or spinal anaesthetic or very occasionally under a general anaesthetic.

During the procedure, antibiotics are given to prevent infection and a urinary catheter (a thin tube) is passed into the bladder to allow drainage of urine.

Aftercare of third and fourth degree tears

After your repair it is recommended that you take the following medication:
- Regular pain relieving medication. Do not wait until you are in pain, but take them on a regular basis for the first few days (as per the instructions on the box) and subsequently as you require them.
- Antibiotics for one week following the birth to prevent infection that could lead to breakdown of the repair.
- The medicine lactulose (a stool softener) and FybogelTM (a high fibre drink) for approximately two weeks, as required. This will help you have your bowels open without straining and avoid constipation.
- Drinking plenty of fluids and eating a well-balanced diet that includes fresh fruit and vegetables as well as fibre will also help you to avoid constipation.

None of the medication offered will prevent you from breastfeeding your baby, however, if you have any questions or concerns please speak to your midwife.

You are also advised to:
- Wash your hands before and after you go to the toilet and/or change your sanitary towel, especially when you go home. You should change your sanitary towel at least every four hours. Ensure it is secured in place so it doesn’t move around and cause further irritation.
- Pat the area dry from front to back to avoid introducing germs from the rectum into the perineal and vaginal area.
- Pour warm water on your perineum when you pass urine. The warm water will dilute the urine so it doesn’t sting the wound. Drinking plenty of water will also keep your urine diluted, this will also help reduce stinging when you pass urine.
- Begin doing pelvic floor exercises as soon as you can after the birth to increase your blood supply to the area and help the healing process. These exercises will also help your pelvic floor region regain its tone and control. Please discuss these with your midwife and refer to the information leaflet “A Guide to Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women”.
- Avoid standing or sitting for long periods and ensure you are comfortable when sitting to feed your baby. Try lying on your side to feed your baby.
- Check your perineum for signs of infection. If the area becomes hot, swollen, weepy, smelly, very painful or starts to open, or you develop a temperature or flu-like symptoms, please let your midwife or GP know. You may be developing an infection and need treatment with antibiotics.
Follow-up care
The follow up care you receive will depend on the degree of injury.

If you have had a 3a, 3b, 3c or fourth degree tear you should:
• Arrange to see your own GP six to eight weeks after the birth of your baby, for your postnatal appointment.
• You will be sent an appointment to be seen by the women’s health physiotherapist approximately 8 weeks after the birth of your baby.
• You will also be sent an appointment to be seen in the perineal trauma clinic approximately 3 months after the birth of your baby.

If you have had a 3a or 3b tear, during the appointment you will be seen by the colorectal specialist nurse and a senior midwife. This appointment may include an endo anal ultrasound scan to check you have healed completely. If you have had a 3c or 4th degree tear, you will be seen by the colorectal specialist nurse and senior midwife and the appointment will include an endoanal scan. Referral on to a consultant gynaecologist to discuss how well the tear has healed and if there is any ongoing injury may also be made.

The endoanal ultrasound scan involves placing a small probe just inside the entrance of the anus so that the anal sphincter (muscular ring around the anus) can be examined and assessed. This can be slightly uncomfortable but should not be painful.

Once you have been examined you will be given the opportunity to discuss future pregnancies and births; the likelihood of you experiencing similar problems in the future and how any of your future babies might best be born.

It is extremely important that you attend this appointment. Please contact the labour ward (01422 224420) if you have not received your appointment for the physiotherapist or perineal trauma clinic during the first six to eight weeks following the birth of your baby.

The consequences of having a third or fourth degree tear
Tears and episiotomies will cause pain and discomfort following birth. Sometimes, passing urine or having a bowel action can be painful. However, you should experience continual improvement. It may also be painful to resume sexual intercourse for quite some time. You are advised to use lubricating jelly and try out different positions to find one that is comfortable for you.

Most women recover very well and have no problems. Some women will continue to have symptoms of bowel urgency (the need to rush to the toilet to have your bowels open) or faecal incontinence (inability to control bowel movements). Related symptoms include passing wind and/or liquid or solid stools without meaning to. If you are experiencing bowel leakage, urgency or problems relating to your pelvic floor exercises please see contact numbers at the end of this leaflet.

Sometimes the healing may not be complete and there may be a weakness in the anal sphincter after repair. This may not necessarily result in you having symptoms, but you may develop problems such as faecal incontinence in later life. If you develop any of these symptoms or there are any ongoing problems, you should consult your doctor to organise further treatment and investigation.

Future pregnancy
If you have another pregnancy, you will be referred to either a consultant obstetrician or consultant midwife for further discussion about the type of delivery that is best for you and your baby. This referral will also give you a chance to talk about any concerns you may have.
Further sources of information and support

This factsheet is intended to give you information and answer any of your immediate questions. Please feel free to discuss any further questions and concerns with your midwife or doctor.

Useful contact numbers

Colorectal Specialist Nurse 01484 355062

Continence Advisory Service (Huddersfield) 0300 3045555

Women’s Health Physiotherapy Team (Calderdale) 01422 224198

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact:

Colorectal Specialist Nurse
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Telephone No: 01484 355062

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzywaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww.

danych kontaktowych

اگر آپ کوئی معلومات کری اور فارمیٹ یا زبان میں نیچہ لئے یا مستقل ہوں تو برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں سے رابطہ کریں۔

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