

# What You Need To Know About...

## Episiotomy

### What You Need to Know

An episiotomy is a surgical cut in the perineum. (That is the area between the vagina and the anus.) When a woman has a baby, the doctor, nurse-midwife, or midwife may make this cut.

If you are pregnant, you should talk to your doctor, nurse-midwife, or midwife about episiotomies, just as you talk about whether you want pain medicine during childbirth. Do it *before* you get to the delivery room!

### To Have or Not to Have an Episiotomy?

Some doctors perform episiotomies for every birth. Researchers looked at the evidence for this *routine* use of episiotomies. They did not look at special cases, such as when a baby's shoulders get stuck during birth.

The research shows that routine use of episiotomies does not keep the mother's skin from tearing during birth. It does not speed up a normal birth. It does not help avoid the bladder control problems women sometimes get after having a baby.



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## **You should know that:**

- Both episiotomies and tears that occur when giving birth may be painful. They may be slow to heal. They can become infected.
- If you do not have an episiotomy, your skin may tear during delivery. But the tear is likely to be smaller than an episiotomy and to heal with less pain.

## **Women who do not have episiotomies:**

- Are likely to start having sex sooner after childbirth than women who have them.
- Have less pain the first time they have sexual intercourse after childbirth.

## **What Should I Do?**

### **Be informed!**

- Talk with your doctor, nurse-midwife, or midwife. Ask the reasons they might perform an episiotomy. Ask how often they perform them.
- Tell your doctor, nurse-midwife, or midwife any questions or concerns you have about having an episiotomy.
- Tell them what you prefer. Your voice counts!

This information came from a report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, produced by the RTI-International/University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Evidence-based Practice Center: *The Use of Episiotomy in Obstetrical Care: A Systematic Review* (<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/tp/epistp.htm>).

