

Pelvic Organ Prolapse Information Sheet

Patient Information

What is pelvic organ prolapse?

The pelvic organs (uterus, vagina, bladder and rectum) are held in place by both muscles and connective tissue. Prolapse occurs when any of the pelvic organs begin to press downward into the vagina. When the bladder pushes downward, into the anterior vaginal wall, it is called a cystocele. A rectocele occurs when the rectum (which lies behind the vagina) presses into the posterior vaginal wall. The uterus may begin to descend downward as well. This is called uterine prolapse. A cystocele and rectocele can also occur with uterine prolapse. Prolapse is a very common condition. It can often be managed well with simple exercise and lifestyle changes.

How does prolapse occur?

Organ prolapse can result from a variety of factors. Weak pelvic floor muscles do not provide good support of the pelvic organs. These muscles can become weak with disuse, age or as a result of childbirth. Prolapse can also occur due to damage to the supporting connective tissue of the pelvis. Excessive bearing down with breath holding, straining associated with heavy lifting, constipation or a chronic cough can injure the connective tissue of the pelvis.

Common treatments for pelvic organ prolapse?

Exercise and prolapse prevention strategies - see below:

- A pessary (a pessary is a removable plastic or rubber device fitted into the vagina to support the pelvic organs).
- Surgery; your health care provider will tell you if this is a good choice for you.

How do I prevent prolapse or prevent it from getting worse?

To prevent prolapse you can:

- Strengthen the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles with simple exercise (see below.)
- Use good posture and body mechanics when lifting by contracting pelvic floor and abdominal muscles together, bending your knees and exhaling with the activity.

- Prevent constipation by drinking 48 ounces of water per day and eating fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Maintain healthy body weight by eating right and exercising regularly.

Use your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles together to prevent prolapse.

To prevent pelvic prolapse, it is important to coordinate strong pelvic floor and abdominal muscles with activity. To find your pelvic floor muscles, contract the muscles around the vagina and rectum as if to hold in urine and gas. Your abdominals will tend to draw in during a pelvic floor contraction. This is normal. To decrease pressure on the pelvic floor, contract your pelvic floor muscles, contract your abdominals and exhale during the activity or exercise.

Exercise for Prolapse prevention

Pelvic floor Exercise: Gradually contract pelvic floor muscles to a maximum contraction. Hold 5-10 counts at a maximum contraction then gradually relax. Rest 5 counts in between contractions and repeat this 8-12 times. Do 3 sets of these exercises daily.

Assisted Pelvic Floor Exercise: Place a belt or exercise band just above your knees around thighs. (You can use an exercise band or waistband from an old pair of panty hose.) Roll your legs out against the resistance of the band as you lift up and in with your pelvic floor muscles. Hold for 10 counts, release for 10 counts. Repeat 10 times, working up to 20 repetitions.

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