

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS ABOUT PELVIC ORGAN PROLAPSE

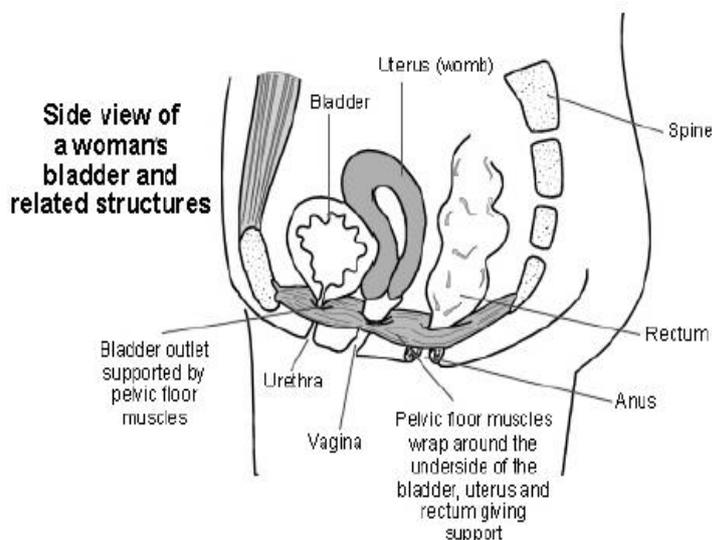
### What is a pelvic organ prolapse?

The organs in a woman's pelvis (uterus, bladder and rectum) are normally held in place by ligaments and muscles known as the pelvic floor. These can be weakened by overstretching leading to the pelvic organs bulging (prolapsing) from their normal place into the vagina. Prolapses are common, especially in older women, with half of women over 50 likely to have some symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse. Mild prolapses often cause no symptoms and can be managed with exercises and lifestyle adaptations.

Prolapses can affect quality of life by causing symptoms such as discomfort or a feeling of heaviness.

### Causes of Prolapse

- Pregnancy
- Childbirth
- Ageing and the menopause
- Genetics-Family history of prolapse
- Obesity
- Chronic cough
- Constipation
- Repeated heavy lifting
- Previous pelvic surgery



## Types of Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Cystocele	Rectocele	Uterine
<p>The front vaginal wall has weakened and the bladder has less support.</p>	<p>The back of the vaginal wall has weakened and the rectum has less support.</p>	<p>The uterus has less support and can lower in to the vaginal space.</p>

Images taken from <https://www.rcog.org.uk>

### Why treat pelvic organ prolapse?

The aims of treatment for prolapse are to ensure that you:

- are comfortable
- are able to pass urine and stools adequately
- are able to have sex comfortably
- do not experience any complications relating to the prolapse, such as urine infections or ulceration of the prolapse

### What are the treatment options for prolapse?

#### Lifestyle changes, useful tips and advice:

- **The “Knack” technique-** this is a technique to help prevent straining. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles before an activity that raises the abdominal pressure such as sneezing, coughing, lifting and laughing.
- **Bladder concerns-** do not reduce your fluid intake to help with bladder urgency or frequency as this will make your urine stronger. This can lead to irritation of the bladder and cause constipation.
- **Bladder irritants-** avoid fizzy, artificial sweetened and caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea and green tea.

- **Relaxation**-increased stress can cause changes to posture and breathing thereby increasing the tension in the pelvic floor muscles. Mindfulness techniques can improve breathing and help to relax the muscles.
- **Weight**- being overweight can increase your symptoms; small changes to your weight can improve symptoms. See your GP practice for additional support if you have tried but not succeeded with weight loss.
- **Exercise**- try low impact exercises such as Pilates, cycling, swimming or walking. You may want to avoid high impact exercises or those that increase the abdominal pressure such as dead lifts, loaded squats, trampolining. and jumping. Avoid loaded or prolonged squatting or standing for long periods and heavy lifting- heavy lifting increases the pressure in your abdomen.
- **Smoking**- If you have a chronic cough and you smoke, then quitting smoking may help reduce the effects of coughing on a prolapse. Your GP practice might be able to support you with this.
- **Constipation**-try to avoid unnecessary strain on your pelvic floor, seek advice if you tend to strain on the toilet from your GP or clinician. Make sure you drink at least 1.5 litres of fluid daily and enough fibre in a well-balanced diet.
- **Toileting positions**- sit and completely relax while on the toilet when opening your bowels, use a stool or step under your feet to help create a squatting position. This will improve the position of your rectum and allow easier emptying when passing a stool. See the diagram illustrating the correct position for bowel opening:



<https://www.bladderandbowel.org/help-information/resources/toilet-positions/>

## **Pelvic floor exercises**

All women with prolapse, whether they have symptoms or not, should do pelvic floor muscle exercises. The exercises may stop mild degrees of prolapse from getting any worse. They may also relieve symptoms such as backache and abdominal discomfort.

### **How to exercise your pelvic floor muscles**

Pelvic floor muscle exercises should include both long and short squeezes. It is important that you let the muscle relax after each contraction to ensure the muscles become strong and most effective.

#### **Exercise 1**

##### **Step 1**

Sit, stand or lie comfortably with your knees slightly apart.

##### **Step 2**

Gently breathe in to prepare and, as you breathe out, tighten the muscle around your back passage as if you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind, now slowly tighten the muscles around your front passage as if you are trying to stop yourself passing urine; lift up from back to front and hold.

Aim to hold both back and front pelvic floor muscles tight for 5-10 seconds (without holding your breath). Fully relax for 4 seconds (relaxation phase) and aim to repeat up to 10 times. Avoid tightening your buttocks and squeezing your legs together. You should feel your lower abdomen draw in slightly.

#### **Exercise 2**

##### **To perform the short squeezes**

In the same position as exercise 1, tighten the back and front pelvic floor muscles for a short strong squeeze followed by relaxing the muscles fully.

Aim to build up to 10 short squeezes without holding your breath. Make sure you are fully relaxing between squeezes.

**Aiming to repeat both long and short squeezes 3-6 times a day**

**Your starting point-** this is the maximum number of seconds you can hold your contraction for (up to 10 seconds) and the maximum times you can repeat this (up to 10 repetitions).

Build up your exercise routine gradually and you should notice an improvement in the first three months (this can sometimes take longer). Aim to progress the position you do your exercises in progressing from lying to sitting to standing and over time practise them whilst doing activities such as walking. Please make sure you are always fully relaxing the pelvic floor muscles in the relaxation phase to prevent any pelvic floor dysfunction.

#### **Tips to remember to exercise:**

- Try to make the exercises part of your daily routine. Perhaps do them at the same time as another activity:  
brushing your teeth / when washing your hands/ after emptying your bladder sat on the toilet.

Please do not practise by stopping your urine flow as this may lead to bladder problems.

#### **Additional suggestions:**

- Try downloading an app on your phone- NHS squeeze app
- Put a reminder on your phone

Medical devices and gadgets aimed to help you with developing pelvic floor muscle strength and control are available to purchase. These may be helpful for some people but may not be right for everyone. If you are having difficulties with these exercises seek advice from a specialist clinician.

#### **Further interventions for prolapse management:**

##### **Vaginal pessaries**

If pelvic floor exercises are not helping reduce your symptoms, a pessary may be required. There are a variety of these devices that insert into the vagina and help support the wall to reduce the prolapse and alleviate symptoms. This treatment may be a good alternative if patients do not wish to undergo surgery.

##### **Surgery**

If symptoms persist after conservative treatments, there are a variety of surgical procedures that may help treat a significant prolapse. If you wish to consider these options, then it would be best to speak to your GP, clinician or consultant.

**Additional resources:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/womens-health/what-are-pelvic-floor-exercises/>

<https://www.bbuk.org.uk/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pelvic-organ-prolapse/>

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as braille, audiotape or large print) please contact the Therapy Services on (01423) 553472

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Version: 1

HDFT approval date: Jan 2022