

Physiotherapy Information about

# Pelvic Organ Prolapse



Hospital: \_\_\_\_\_

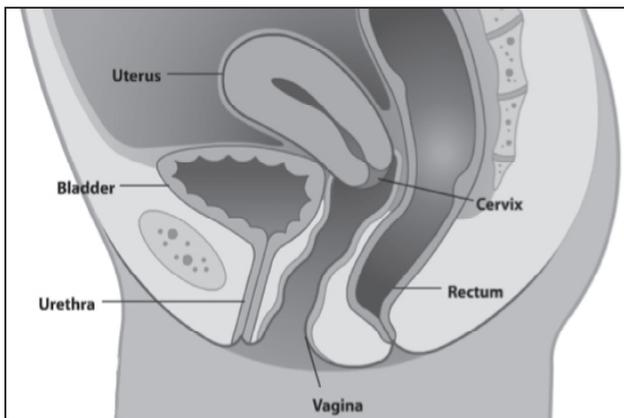
Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_

This booklet gives you information about:

- What is a prolapse
- Types of prolapse
- The symptoms of a prolapse
- Possible causes of a prolapse
- What you can do to help
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises

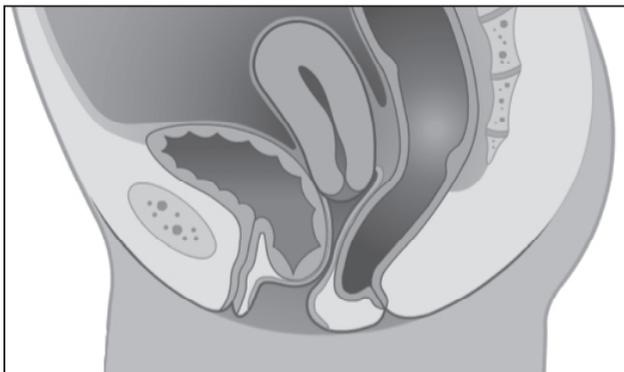
## What is a Prolapse?

The pelvic organs (bladder, uterus and rectum) are held in position by ligaments and pelvic floor muscles. A prolapse can occur if these supporting structures weaken. One or more of the organs can press against the vaginal walls, which in some cases can bulge beyond the opening of the vagina. About one third of women may have symptoms of a prolapse.



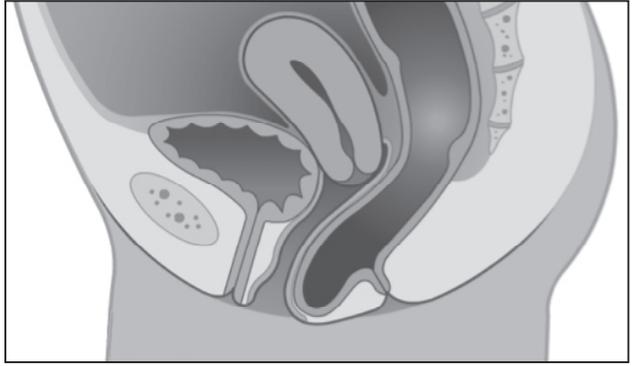
## Types of Prolapse

**Front wall prolapse:**  
When the vaginal wall supporting the bladder bulges down.



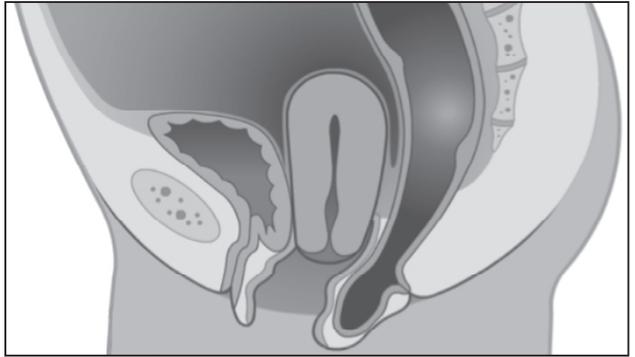
**Back wall prolapse:**

When the vaginal wall supporting the rectum bulges down.



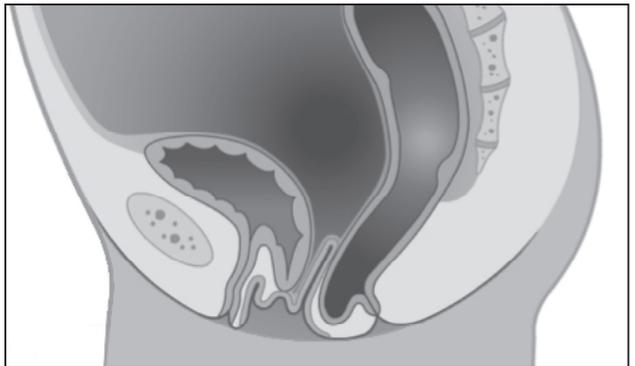
**Uterine Prolapse:**

When the uterus comes down into the vagina.



**Vaginal Vault Prolapse:**

When the top of the vagina comes down into the vagina. This can only occur in women who have previously had their uterus removed (hysterectomy).



# What are the symptoms of Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

## Vaginal symptoms may include:

- a feeling of 'something coming down' within the vagina
- a feeling of pressure, heaviness or a dragging feeling within the vagina, abdomen or lower back
- a feeling of a lump in the vagina or outside the vagina
- difficulty with using tampons; they may be difficult to put in, not fit well, be uncomfortable or may slip out
- discomfort or pain during sexual intercourse

## Urinary symptoms may include:

- a need to pass urine often and suddenly
- having to get up to the toilet at night
- leakage of urine
- difficulty starting or a slow stream of urine when emptying your bladder
- a feeling of not emptying your bladder properly and needing to return to the toilet too soon

## Bowel symptoms may include:

- having to strain to empty your bowels
- a feeling that your bowels have not fully emptied
- a feeling of a sudden urge to open your bowels
- leakage of wind, or losing control of your bowels
- having to use your hand to press around the vagina or back passage to help get your stools out

# What are the possible causes of Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Being overweight
- Heavy lifting
- Repeated bending
- Family history
- Menopausal changes
- Chronic constipation
- Persistent cough
- Previous pelvic surgery

## What can I do to help?

Certain activities are likely to make you more aware of your prolapse. Activities which increase the pressure on, or strain the pelvic floor muscles could make your symptoms worse.

**Take care when heavy lifting or bending, for example:**

### 1. Doing laundry



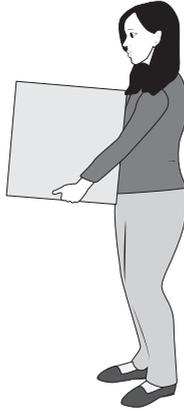
### 2. Gardening



### 3. Lifting



### 4. Carrying



When you have to lift something tighten your pelvic floor muscles and keep them tightened while carrying any objects.

## Going to the toilet

### Bowels

Make time to open your bowels and don't ignore the urge to go after eating.

Avoid constipation: having a well balanced diet containing fruit and vegetables and making sure you are drinking enough can help you to avoid having hard stools and needing to strain to empty your bowels.

Being in the right position with your feet on a small stool and comfortably apart may help with difficulty emptying your bowels.



### Bladder

Try not to get into the habit of going to the toilet too often. Take your time on the toilet and don't rush. Leaning fully forwards and then back to upright can help your bladder fully empty.

### Other ways to help

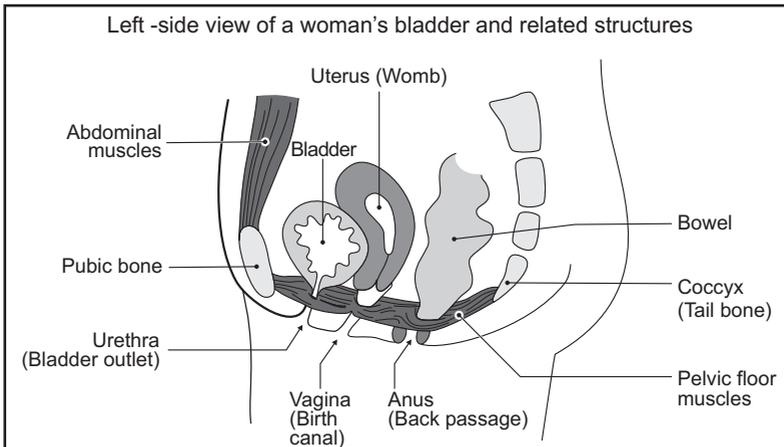
- Tightening your pelvic floor muscles before and during coughing and sneezing can protect against this increased pressure on your pelvic floor muscles.
- Losing weight may help to reduce the symptoms from your prolapse.
- Try to avoid standing for long periods. Altering daily activities may help relieve your symptoms, for example, sit to iron or prepare food instead of standing.
- If you notice that your prolapse symptoms are worse following a particular exercise, please ask your pelvic floor physiotherapist for suitable alternative exercises. Avoid high impact exercise including running, jumping, some aerobic exercise classes, lifting heavy weights, sit-ups and double leg lifts.

- Sexual intercourse will not make your prolapse worse. If sex is uncomfortable using a lubricant may help and some positions may be more comfortable than others.

Listen to your body – if your prolapse feels worse after a particular activity it is probably not a good thing to do.

## Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises

Your pelvic floor muscles form a broad sling running from the front to the back and as their name suggests, they form the floor of your pelvis.



Your pelvic floor muscles need to be strong and firm. Weak pelvic floor muscles may result in a feeling of something coming down in the vagina, less control of your bladder and bowel and sometimes a lack of vaginal sensation with sexual intercourse. Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles can help to reduce your prolapse and improve your symptoms.

## How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises

Lie, sit or stand with your knees slightly apart. Tighten up your back passage as though you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind. At the same time tighten the muscles that you would use to stop yourself from passing urine. The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing up the front and back passages.

This is called a 'pelvic floor muscle contraction'.

Try not to

- Clench your buttocks
- Squeeze your legs together
- Hold your breath

You may feel some tightening around your lower stomach - this is normal.

## There are many ways you can check you are doing the exercises correctly.

- Hold a small mirror so that you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the muscles. The area between your back passage and vagina should move inwards away from the mirror. **Stop if you see a bulge or more bulging.**
- While sitting or lying you can put your hand on the area between your back passage and vagina and tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should be able to feel movement inwards away from your hands.
- In a comfortable position you can gently insert your thumb or index finger into your vagina. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles draw in around your thumb or finger.
- If you are sexually active, try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles during sexual activity, and ask if your partner can feel it

**It is very important to exercise correctly to make improvements and to avoid making your symptoms worse.**

A specialist physiotherapist can help you.

Please Turn Over

## Your exercise programme

It is important to concentrate when you are doing your pelvic floor muscle exercises as this will improve your awareness and help you to do them correctly. If you are aware of a feeling of 'something coming down' start your exercises in a comfortable lying position.

### Slow exercises

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and hold the squeeze for \_\_\_\_ seconds until the muscle feels tired
- Relax fully for \_\_\_\_ seconds
- Now tighten your pelvic floor muscles again for the same time

### Repeat this until the muscle gets tired.

As you practise you will gradually be able to hold the squeeze for longer and rest for a shorter amount of time.

Eventually aim for a 10 second hold repeated 10 times.

### Fast exercises

- Quickly tighten up your pelvic floor muscles
- Hold for 1 second and then relax fully
- Repeat this until the muscle gets tired

Eventually aim for \_\_\_\_ times.

To strengthen the muscles it is necessary to repeat the slow and fast exercises 3 to 6 times each day.

You should keep doing the exercises for 3 – 5 months to get the maximum benefit - even if your symptoms seem to improve sooner.

Once your pelvic floor muscles become stronger, practise the exercises in different positions, e.g. sitting or standing; standing will be the most difficult.

Once your pelvic floor muscles are strong it is important to maintain this strength. Try to continue your exercises one to two times daily for the rest of your life. If you do not, then your muscles could become weak again and your symptoms may return.

## **Will my prolapse get worse?**

Not all prolapses get worse and pelvic floor exercises may improve your prolapse symptoms.

## **What else might help?**

Using oestrogen creams or pessaries within the vagina may help the vagina to feel more comfortable.

**Vaginal Pessary:** This is a device which is placed into the vagina to support the pelvic organs and the vagina and can help to improve your symptoms. You can still do pelvic floor exercises with this in place. It can be fitted by your doctor.

## Further information

### Useful websites:

<https://patient.info/>

[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)

[www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)

[www.bladderandbowel.org](http://www.bladderandbowel.org)

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