

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES

Your pelvic floor muscles form a sling running from back to front, forming the floor of the pelvis.

Try to exercise first in a lying position as there will be less load on the muscles. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and, at the same time, trying to stop the flow of urine. The feeling is one of squeeze and lift, closing and drawing up in the front passage, vagina and back passage. Try to hold this for a few seconds before relaxing (don't hold your breath during this exercise).

Next try the exercise in standing as this is what you really need to do to help support your prolapse.

Gradually build up the length of the hold to 10 seconds or more if possible, maintaining the strongest possible hold. Repeat this 10 times if you can.

You should also practise some short, sharp contractions. These are useful to prevent urinary leakage associated with coughing and sneezing. Do 10 contractions in a row.

To strengthen your muscles you should try to exercise them at least three times daily. Remembering is difficult, so try to tie the exercises in with things you do regularly, eg after every meal. It will take three months or more to get good results, but all women should really do pelvic floor exercises daily—for life!

PROLAPSE Helping Yourself

If you require this leaflet in any other format, e.g. large print, please telephone
01935 384526

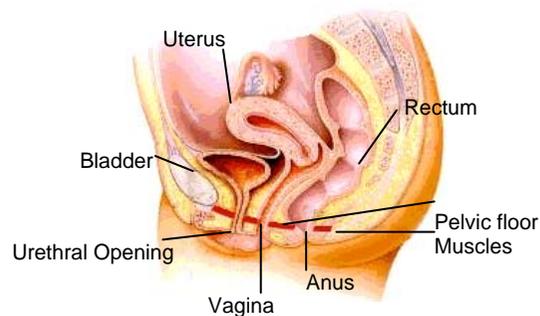
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WHAT IS PROLAPSE?

Prolapse is a drop-down of one or more of the pelvic organs which happens when the support tissues (ligaments and muscles) in the pelvis are weak and stretched. If the womb (uterus) prolapses, it drops down into the vagina. If the bladder or bowel (rectum) prolapse, they bulge into the vagina, and the vaginal walls can drop down.

It is a very common problem and approximately half of all women who have had children will have some degree of prolapse, but it may not be severe enough to give them any symptoms. Prolapse is not dangerous, but it can cause a great deal of discomfort and distress.



WHAT DOES A PROLAPSE FEEL LIKE?

It is common to feel heaviness or a dragging sensation in the vaginal and low abdominal area. You may notice a bulge at the entrance to the vagina. Some women find intercourse more difficult or painful (frequently feeling there is something in the way), particularly if there is vaginal dryness.

Some women get urinary incontinence along with their prolapse (although some others notice that as their prolapse gets worse they have less leakage).

If there is a prolapse of the bowel, this can lead to problems with bowel emptying. It is important to ask for help with this.

Some women will not have any symptoms, but a prolapse may be noted during a medical examination (eg a smear test). There is no need to be worried. If you read through this leaflet and follow the advice offered, you will reduce the risk of your symptoms worsening.

WHY HAVE I GOT A PROLAPSE?

To a large extent, it depends on the quality of the support tissue in your pelvis (this is inherited, if other female members of your family have this problem, it increases the chance that you and your daughters will also be at risk).

Other factors that can lead to prolapse are:

- Childbirth, particularly difficult labours, large babies, multiple births, older mothers, etc.
- Constipation and straining.
- Chronic chest conditions involving excessive coughing over a long period.
- Repeated and excessive heavy lifting.
- Previous gynaecological surgery.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

It depends upon how severe the prolapse is. If you get a lot of discomfort and can feel the prolapse bulging, then you probably need medical or surgical treatment, but you will still benefit from the following advice. It really helps if you can get your muscles stronger before surgery.

LIFESTYLE ADVICE

Remember that you are working against the effects of gravity! You may notice your prolapse is worse later in the day, especially if you have been on your feet for long periods. When it is troublesome, if possible, lie down for a few minutes with your feet up, then do some long strong pelvic floor contractions (see next section).

- Avoid standing for long periods without a break.
- Avoid heavy and repeated lifting. If this is part of your job then discuss with your employer. The Health and Safety at Work legislation is there to protect you against misusing your body, but it is your responsibility to raise the issue.
- Learn to brace your pelvic floor muscles (don't hold your breath) just before you lift or cough or sneeze as this will provide protection.
- Try to prevent constipation through a good diet and drinking plenty of fluid (ask for more help on this from your physiotherapist or nurse).
- Try to give up smoking. Ask your GP for advice if you have a persistent cough.
- If you have continence problems and have not had treatment, ask your GP for a referral.
- A good lubricant can help with sex and some positions may be more comfortable than others.
- Exercise is important, but choose exercise that avoids jumping, eg low impact classes, pilates, swimming or walking.