



Information for
patients and
carers

Vaginal Pessary

For the treatment of Vaginal Prolapse

What is a vaginal prolapse?

A vaginal prolapse is a common condition where the walls of the vagina, and sometimes the womb, are no longer supported. They can bulge down into the vagina and sometimes out of the vagina. A vaginal prolapse is not a life-threatening condition however it can cause a great deal of discomfort and distress.

Common symptoms of a prolapse include:

- A sensation of something coming down, or heaviness or bulge in the vagina
- Lower backache
- Difficulties or pain during sexual intercourse
- Difficulty in emptying the bladder and /or bowel, or you may find that you leak urine

A prolapse is frequently caused by a combination of different things, for example:

- Chronic constipation and straining
- Pregnancy & childbirth
- Heavy lifting
- Chronic cough
- Being overweight
- Getting older

What are the treatments for a vaginal prolapse?

The main treatment options include:

- Pelvic floor muscle exercises
- Pessary and pelvic floor exercises
- Surgery

Pelvic floor exercises can help to strengthen the muscles that hold your vagina in place. You might be referred to the women's health physiotherapy team, if required. If the exercises do not improve your prolapse symptoms, a vaginal pessary may be a suitable solution, particularly to avoid an invasive operation.

You may be able to improve the symptoms of a prolapse by making some lifestyle changes such as stopping smoking or losing weight. If you wish help with these then please speak to your consultant or pessary nurse for details.

What is a vaginal pessary?

A vaginal pessary is a device that is inserted into the vagina to hold a prolapsed womb and/or vaginal walls in place. Pessaries are made of latex or silicone and come in many different shapes and sizes. They should fit comfortably and once the correct size and style are fitted, you should be unaware that the pessary is present. The two most common types of pessaries that we use are Ring and Gelhorn pessaries.

RING PESSARY



GELHORN PESSARY



However, it depends on the type of prolapse that you have as to which type of pessary is used. Other types include donuts, cubes and shelf pessaries.

A vaginal pessary can be used if you wish to avoid an operation or control symptoms whilst you await your surgery. A pessary may be recommended if you want to have children or if you have health problems that deem you unsuitable for surgery. The doctor will discuss which type is best for you.

What are the benefits of a vaginal pessary?

Having a pessary inserted will not cure a vaginal prolapse, however a pessary can help to treat and control the symptoms. It may help to relieve your symptoms and make you feel more comfortable, allowing you to continue with your everyday activities such as working, exercising and caring for your family.

What are the risks of having a vaginal pessary?

There are a few side effects and risks. Your doctor or nurse will inform you about these, some of the more common are listed below:

- You may notice an increase in vaginal discharge, sometimes this can smell and be different in colour
- You may have some vaginal irritation. If you feel uncomfortable, and have been through the menopause you may benefit from using oestrogen cream or tablets in the vagina
- You may have bleeding from the vagina. This may be caused by the pessary rubbing and causing grazing on the vaginal skin. If this occurs you should inform the Gynaecology Clinic (via the number listed at the end of this leaflet). We will arrange to remove your pessary (we will tell you for how long) to allow the grazing or abrasion to heal and provide you with a prescription for some oestrogen in the form of creams or dissolvable pessaries (if not contra-indicated) for a period of time. This repairs the vaginal skin, stopping it from becoming thin and dry. You will be given specific instructions on this, if required

- You may have difficulty passing urine or problems opening your bowels
- Your pessary may fall out

The vagina is a closed tube so the pessary cannot go anywhere else in the body. If you strain on the toilet or bend or squat to lift something heavy it may fall out. You can hold one hand over the vaginal opening when emptying your bowels to keep the pessary in place. You will do no harm gently pushing the pessary back in place should it slip down.

How is the pessary fitted?

The Doctor or Specialist Nurse will fit your pessary in the gynaecology clinic. They will talk to you about your symptoms and decide which type of pessary is best for you. A vaginal examination will be carried out to give an estimation of which size you will need; a chaperone will be offered before any intimate examination is conducted. It may take a few attempts to get the correct size for you. The pessary will then be placed into your vagina and moved into place behind the pubic bone. It takes around 30 seconds to 1 minute to insert it and get it in the right place. It may feel uncomfortable being inserted but should not be painful. After the initial fitting you will be asked to walk around and go to the toilet to pass urine. When the pessary is in the correct place you should not be able to feel it. If it feels uncomfortable or falls out, or you cannot pass urine with the pessary in place, you may need a different size or type of pessary. Once you feel comfortable with the pessary you can go home and carry on with your normal daily routine.

How often should my pessary be changed?

Your pessary should either be changed and replaced or washed and reinserted every 3-6 months. You will be sent a follow-up appointment to return to see the Doctor or Specialist Nurse (depending on the type of pessary you have fitted). They will remove the pessary and check for

any problems such as bleeding, ulceration or infection before replacing it or washing and reinserting your existing one.

It is very important to attend all of your appointments. If the pessary is left in for too long there can be problems trying to remove it. In extreme cases it would need to be removed under general anaesthetic.

Sometimes your GP can change your pessary, if this is not possible you will have to come to the hospital to have it changed.

Can I have sexual intercourse with a pessary in place?

Please talk to your Doctor or Specialist Nurse about this. You can have sexual intercourse with a Ring pessary in place but not with a Gelhorn or other types of pessaries. We can teach you how to remove the ring pessary before sexual intercourse and how to reinsert it yourself if you would prefer. This is safe to do at home. Please note the pessary is not a form of contraception, so please do continue using your preferred method of contraception.

If I have a problem with my pessary, who should I contact?

Please telephone the Gynaecology Outpatient Department. If you have a ring pessary then ask to speak to the pessary nurse.

Telephone - Gynaecology Outpatient Department:**01772 524386**
(Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

There is an answerphone available. Please leave your name, number and short message and we aim to get back to you by the end of the next working day.

Out of hours contact for emergencies only:

Gynae Assessment Unit (GAU):**01772 524415**

If you need an interpreter or need this information in another format such as another language, braille, audio, electronically, large print, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact Gynaecology Outpatients on the contact details outlined above.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

[United Kingdom Continence Society - UK Pessary Guidelines 2021 \(ukcs.uk.net\)](http://ukcs.uk.net)

[The British Society of Urogynaecology \(BSUG\)](http://www.bsug.org)

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If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

Gujarati:

આ માહિતીને સમજવામાં સહાયતા જોઈતી હોય તો કૃપા કરીને પૂછો. આ માહિતી મોટા છપાણામાં અને અન્ય ભાષામાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરી શકાય છે.

Romanian:

Vă rugăm să întrebați dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru înțelegerea acestor informații. Aceste informații pot fi puse la dispoziție în format mare și în alte limbi.”

Polish:

Poinformuj nas, jeśli potrzebna jest ci pomoc w zrozumieniu tych informacji. Informacje te można również udostępnić dużym drukiem oraz w innych językach

Punjabi:

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਸਮਝਣ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਦਦ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਛੋ। ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਿੰਟ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।

Urdu:

دوسری زبانوں اور بڑی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے لئے مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو
یہ چھپا ہن یہ ابی دست بو یسکت ہے براے مہر یبان پوے چھہی۔ معلومات

Arabic:

مطبوعه بأحرف كبيرة و بلغات إذا كنت تريد مساعدة في فهم هذه المعلومات يرجى أن تطلب
أخرى يمكن توفير هذه المعلومات

Department: Gynaecology

Division: Women's Health

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