

Having a pessary for a vaginal prolapse

This leaflet will explain the benefits, risks and alternatives of having a pessary fitted for vaginal prolapse. Please ask your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist if you have any further questions.

What is a vaginal prolapse?

Vaginal prolapse is a common condition where the walls of the vagina, and sometimes the womb, are no longer supported. They bulge down inside and sometimes outside the vagina. A vaginal prolapse is not harmful but treatment should help to ease your symptoms.

Common symptoms of a prolapse include:

- the feeling of a lump in your vagina
- not being able to empty your bladder or bowel fully
- difficulty with sexual intercourse
- lower backache.

A prolapse is usually caused by a combination of different things, such as:

- pregnancy and childbirth
- chronic constipation and straining
- lots of heavy lifting
- being overweight
- chronic coughing
- getting older.

What are the treatments for vaginal prolapse?

The treatments for vaginal prolapse are:

- pelvic floor exercises
- pessary and pelvic floor exercises
- surgery.

Pelvic floor exercises help to strengthen the muscles that hold your vagina in place. If these exercises don't improve your prolapse and you want to avoid surgery, a vaginal pessary may be a suitable treatment. Your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist will talk through the options with you. Please see our leaflet, **Treating your prolapse**.

What is a vaginal pessary?

It is a plastic or silicone device which is inserted into your vagina to hold a prolapsed womb or vaginal wall in place. You will be fitted with either a ring or gellhorn pessary, depending on the type of prolapse that you have. Your doctor or nurse will discuss this with you.

What are the benefits?

Having a pessary inserted won't cure your prolapse, but it may help to ease the symptoms and make you feel more comfortable. This will allow you to continue with your everyday activities such as exercising, working and caring for your family.

What are the risks?

There are a few side effects and risks. Your doctor or nurse will tell you about these.

- You may notice you have more vaginal discharge than normal and sometimes this can smell.
- You may have vaginal irritation. If you feel sore, and have been through the menopause, you may benefit from using oestrogen cream or tablets in the vagina.
- Long-term use may cause ulcers (sores) inside the vagina, or infection. You can avoid this by using vaginal oestrogen (as either a cream or a vaginal pessary) and by having your pessary changed every four to six months.

How is the pessary fitted?

Before you have a pessary fitted, you will have a vaginal examination to find out the size of pessary you will need. It may take more than one fitting to find the correct size for you. If it is uncomfortable or falls out, you may need a different size of pessary.

You will be asked to walk around and go to the toilet to pass urine once your pessary has been fitted. When the pessary is in the correct position, you should not be able to feel it.

How often should my pessary be changed?

Your ring or gellhorn pessary will be changed and replaced every 4-6 months. You will receive an appointment to come back and see your doctor or specialist nurse. They will remove the pessary and check for any problems, such as bleeding, ulcers or infection in the vagina, before replacing it with another one.

Your GP may be able to change your pessary. If they are unable to do this, it will need to be replaced in hospital.

How long will I need a pessary for?

A pessary can be used as a temporary measure until you have surgery for the prolapse. They can also be used long term if you don't want to have surgery, or where surgery may not be safe for health reasons, or you plan to have more children.

Can I have sexual intercourse with a pessary in place?

Please talk to your nurse, doctor or physiotherapist about this. You can have sex with a ring pessary in place, but you cannot with a gellhorn pessary. We can teach you how to remove and replace the ring pessary if it feels uncomfortable while you're having sex.

What happens if I have a problem with my pessary?

Please contact the department if your pessary falls out or you experience any problems with it. We will arrange for you to be seen sooner to sort out your problems. Please see the contact details at the end of this leaflet.

Useful sources of information

Bladder and Bowel Community

A charitable organisation for people with bladder and bowel control problems (including prolapse), providing information and support services.

w: www.bladderandbowel.org

Contact us

If you have any questions or queries, or your pessary falls out, then please contact the clinical nurse specialist in urogynaecology, **t:** 020 7188 3671 (Mondays, Tuesdays and alternate Thursdays, answerphone at other times). Or, you can call the McNair Centre, **t:** 020 7188 3584.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111 **w:** 111.nhs.uk

NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Leaflet number: 4214/VER2

Date published: April 2019

Review date: April 2022

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A list of sources is available on request