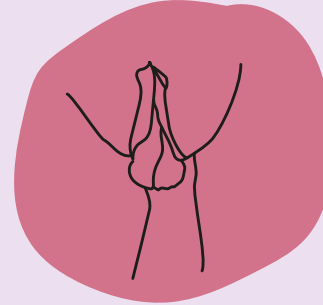




Vaginal Pessaries

Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Pelvic Organ Prolapse (prolapse) results from weakness in the pelvic floor (muscle, collagen, ligaments and connective tissue) that supports the pelvic organs, e.g. uterus, bladder, vagina, and bowel. This weakness allows the pelvic organs to sag or bulge into or out of the vagina.



Prolapse Symptoms

Prolapse symptoms may include a bulge, pressure or dragging sensation in the vagina, as if something is 'coming down' within the vagina. A bulge may be seen at the entrance to the vagina, and lower back ache can also be a symptom of prolapse. Prolapse can cause urinary symptoms such as involuntary leaking of urine during exertion and incomplete bladder emptying. Prolapse-associated bowel symptoms may include incomplete emptying or the need to press on the vagina to empty the bowel.

Vaginal Pessaries

A vaginal pessary is one method used to manage prolapse. The pessary is a removable device placed into the vagina, that is designed to support areas of weakness. For many women, the vaginal pessary may provide an alternative to surgical management of pelvic organ prolapse.

Who might benefit by using a pessary?

A ring pessary can be used to treat women with a mild degree of prolapse and symptoms described above.

Prolapse is commonly associated with:

- Normal ageing
- Multiple vaginal births
- Pregnancy
- Postpartum

The ring pessary may also benefit women that are waiting for surgical management of prolapse, or not suitable for surgery, for example:

- Women with health problems which would make surgery unsafe
- Women who prefer not to have surgery



How do I know if a pessary will help me?

Discuss your symptoms with your healthcare provider. Some investigations may be necessary before trying a pessary, for example, a urine test to exclude urinary infection, a pelvic ultrasound and/or special tests to assess bladder function (urodynamics). A vaginal examination is also required to assess for prolapse. Then, if appropriate, a vaginal pessary will be selected and fitted. Often a trial of using the pessary may be the only way to see if it will improve your symptoms.

How is the pessary fitted?

A doctor or nurse will conduct a vaginal exam and determine the appropriate size pessary for you. Pessaries come in several sizes and shapes; therefore, you may need to try more than one pessary in order to find the most comfortable fit and correct prolapse support. What happens after the pessary is fitted? Your healthcare provider will organise a follow-up appointment to assess your symptoms and how the pessary is working for you. Ongoing follow-up is required to make sure the pessary is still providing benefit and not causing complications. A management plan will be developed based on your individual needs, and review would typically occur every 3 to 6 months. Some women will choose to remove, clean and reinsert the pessary themselves. These women may not require frequent follow up, e.g. yearly review rather than every 3 months. Other women will choose to have the pessary removed and cleaned by a doctor or nurse.

What is it like to have a pessary?

If you have a pessary that is the correct size and in the correct position, you won't be able to feel it and you will be able to do your normal activities. Some vaginal pessaries may be kept in place during sexual intercourse; other pessaries will need to be removed and replaced after sex.

Benefits of vaginal pessaries

Vaginal pessaries do not cure pelvic organ prolapse; however, they can provide significant improvement in symptoms related to prolapse. Pessaries are a conservative method to manage prolapse and may help some women avoid surgery. Pessaries are not permanent, and they allow women the freedom to maintain regular activities. Vaginal pessaries may be removed and cleaned by the woman, allowing self-management and reducing the need for frequent visits to a health care provider. Research has shown that pelvic floor muscle training in combination with vaginal pessaries may maximize symptom improvement from pelvic organ prolapse.*

Complications of vaginal pessaries

Possible complications associated with pessaries include:

- Increased vaginal discharge
- Mild vaginal ulceration and bleeding (trauma to vaginal skin)
- Constipation (unable to empty bowel)
- Urinary incontinence (involuntary leaking of urine)

Less common complications may include:

- Bacterial vaginosis (vaginal infection)
- Systemic infection
- Pessary impaction (stuck and difficult to remove)

Complications can be minimized with a correctly fitted pessary and attending regular follow-up visits with your healthcare provider.

Endnotes

*Cheung RY, et al. Vaginal Pessary in Women with Symptomatic Pelvic Organ Prolapse: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Obs Gyn.* 2016; 128(1):73-80



You have been fitted with the following vaginal pessary:

Type:

Size:

In consultation with your healthcare provider, your follow-up visits will take place:

- 3-monthly
- 6-monthly
- Yearly
- Other (explain):

The next appointment for review of your pessary is:

Notify your healthcare provider as soon as possible if you experience pain with your pessary or have any difficulty emptying your bladder or emptying your bowel.

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