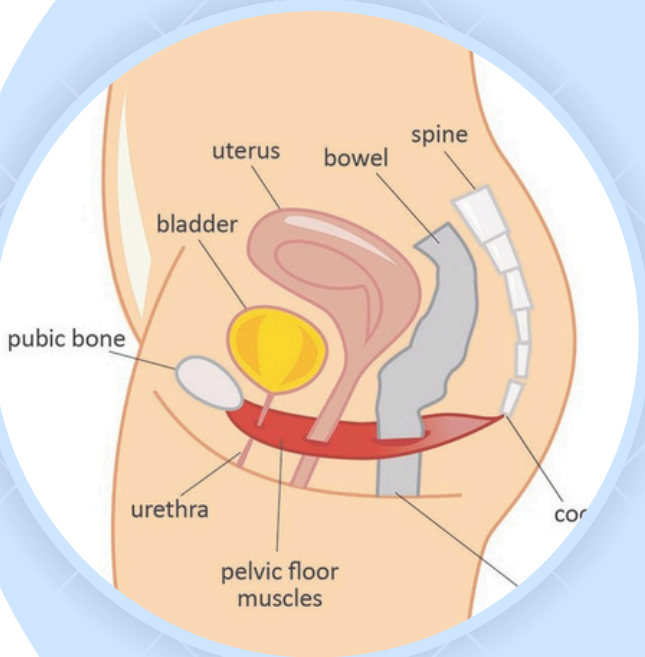




An tOspidéal Náisiúnta Máithreachais
The National Maternity Hospital

Physiotherapy Department

Pelvic Organ Prolapse



Prolapse is very common affecting an estimated 50% of women, though some prolapses may be mild and without symptoms.

It can occur when the pelvic floor muscles, ligaments and tissue that support your bladder, bowel and uterus become weakened.

Pelvic organ prolapse is not a life threatening condition but it can affect your quality of life by causing discomfort.

You may experience a feeling of heaviness or a dragging sensation in the pelvis which may get worse as the day progresses. It can also cause bladder and bowel symptoms, and having sex may feel different.



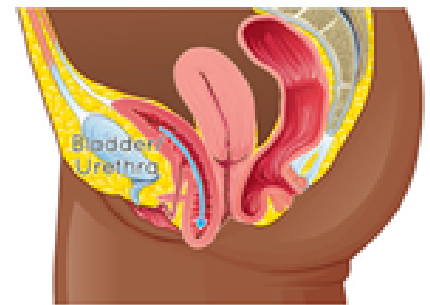
Visit our website: www.nmh.ie

Types of Prolapse

Anterior wall prolapse (Cystocele)

This occurs when the bladder bulges into the front (anterior) wall of the vagina.

Symptoms may include a feeling of heaviness, a vaginal bulge, or bladder problems such as needing to pass urine often or difficulty emptying the bladder.



Cystocele / Cystourethrocele

Posterior wall prolapse (Rectocele)

This happens when the bowel bulges into the back (posterior) wall of the vagina.

It can cause discomfort, a vaginal bulge, or bowel symptoms such as difficulty opening the bowels or a feeling of incomplete emptying.

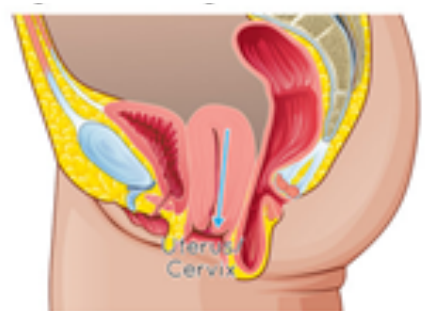


Rectocele

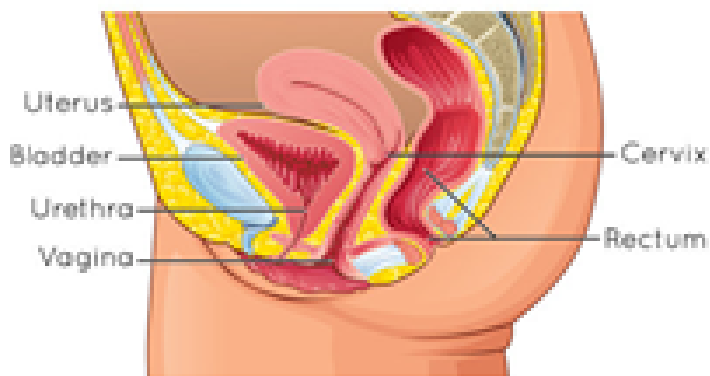
Uterine prolapse

This occurs when the uterus (womb) drops down into the vagina due to weakened support.

Symptoms may include pelvic pressure, a feeling of something coming down, or seeing or feeling a bulge at the vaginal opening.



Uterine prolapse

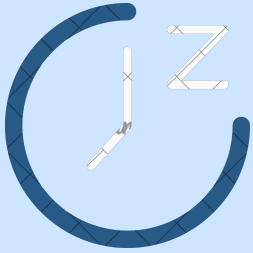


Anatomy without prolapse

Treatment Options

Your options for treatment will depend on the type and degree of prolapse you have and your individual circumstances, such as age, general health, and lifestyle. Your choice of treatment will depend on how much your prolapse affects your quality of life.

If you have a pelvic organ prolapse you have the following choices in terms of treatment:



Do nothing and wait to see if your symptoms change

Some women may have some improvement in mild prolapse in the early months after giving birth/recovering from pregnancy. As your pelvic floor strengthens and hormonal changes settle down, some women will see symptoms improve



Lifestyle Changes - short term

There are several things you can do to minimise your discomfort:

- Look after your bowel and bladder - see next page for more details
- Rest after periods of long standing or walking
- Try to avoid or reduce the amount of heavy lifting you do. Encourage small children to climb up on to your knee instead of lifting them from the ground. Split the load into smaller more manageable weights when carrying groceries etc.
- Wear one or even two sanitary towels or stretchy support leggings to give comfort and support to the prolapse.
- Take time out to relax. Symptoms of prolapse will always feel worse when you are tired or stressed
- Maintaining a healthy weight has been shown to positively improve prolapse
- Stop smoking and managing a long-standing cough if you have one

Exercise

Exercise has many positive effects on both your physical and emotional wellbeing.

Do not be afraid of exercise and activity because of your prolapse. Think of all the movements you do on a daily basis. Normal movement is important for function.

- Strengthening is important for your pelvic floor, mental health and often your sense of personal identity.
- Try to be in tune with your body, if any exercise feels uncomfortable or painful or if you are experiencing any symptoms such as leaking or pressure, don't continue and seek advice from a healthcare professional.
- Begin or return to general exercise by gradually increasing intensity.

Exercise continued

Initially work on low impact exercise such as modified aerobics, cycling, cross trainer, faster walking, Pilates or swimming. If your normal exercise routine makes your prolapse symptoms worse, seek advice about how it can be modified.

We recommend working under the guidance of a pelvic health physiotherapist and/or a qualified personal trainer, especially for women who want to return to high impact/intensity exercise or weight lifting.

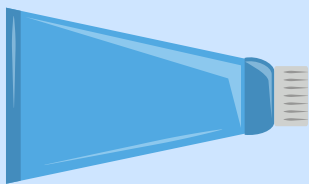
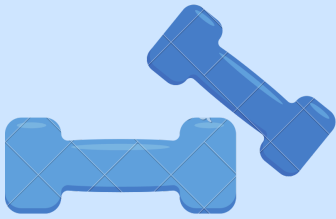
If you require any guidance on returning to exercise, you can request a physiotherapy referral from your doctor and we would be happy to help.

Vaginal Pessaries

- A pessary is a PVC or silicone device that fits into your vagina to help support the pelvic organs.
- There are various types and sizes of pessary; your physiotherapist or doctor will advise which one is best for your situation. Fitting the correct size of pessary is important and may take more than one attempt. Pessaries should be changed or removed, cleaned and reinserted regularly.
- Pessaries do not usually cause any problems but may on occasion cause inflammation.
- It is possible to have sex with some types of pessary although you and your partner may occasionally be aware of it so some women prefer to remove their pessary for sex.

Vaginal Oestrogen

- A course of vaginal oestrogen medication may help with prolapse symptoms, particularly vaginal dryness and milder bladder symptoms such as urgency.
- It works locally to improve the quality of vaginal tissue making it thicker and better lubricated and as a result, improving the strength.
- The medication can be in the form of tablets, cream or a ring that is inserted into your vagina.
- Please note vaginal oestrogen needs to be prescribed by your GP/doctor and is not recommended for use in pregnancy



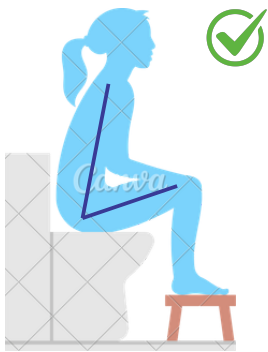
Bowel & Bladder Care

Bowels

It is important to avoid constipation as it puts strain on the pelvic floor muscles and can worsen prolapse symptoms. Stool should be soft, formed and easy to pass.

- Try not to miss meals. Eat breakfast to allow your digestive system time to work before you have to leave the house.
- Don't delay going to the loo once you have the urge to empty your bowels
- Ask your doctor about any medications you are prescribed. Some may be causing constipation, so you may need to make allowances for this.
- Avoid relying on laxatives; use for short term only.

The following will help you to comfortably pass a bowel motion:



- Use a foot stool to ensure your knees are higher than your hips
- Maintain a straight back avoid slumping
- Lean forward resting forearms on thighs
- Practice your deep breathing to help the pelvic floor relax
- Swell your tummy rather than straining - imagine you are blowing out birthday candles or saying the word "OOooo"
- **Relax and don't rush**
- Some women may find it helpful to support the perineum (the area between the back passage and the vagina) when emptying their bowels.
- Applying some pressure vaginally on the bulging wall towards the back passage may help to empty the bowels more fully and effectively.

The following can help soften the consistency of your stool can help with stimulating digestion:



1 Variety of fruit and veg



2 Daily fibre in your diet (30g: eg nuts, veg, chia seeds, flax seeds)



3 Regular fluids (~2L water)



4 Movement & exercise

Bladder

Sometimes you may not feel when your bladder is full and if bladder emptying is delayed this may result in leakage urine. We can manage this by:

- **Scheduled voiding** = going to the toilet every 2hrs even if you have no sensation to pass urine
- **Double voiding** = after the flow of urine stops, stand up and sit down again to ensure the bladder is fully emptying

Next we will discuss pelvic floor exercises which can help to prevent these issues.



Exercise

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Correct breathing lays the foundation for strengthening through your 'core'.

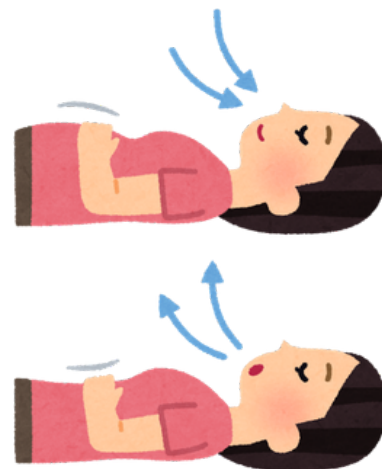
By "just breathing" you will gently moving your deep abdominals, diaphragm and pelvic floor.

It allows you to build the core foundation you need for daily movements, to prepare your body for exercise and manage stress and anxiety.

The diaphragm is the muscle that sits just below your lungs. Your diaphragm and pelvic floor move up and down like a piston while you inhale and exhale. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.

By slowly breathing all the way into the lower lungs and letting the tummy flop out, this helps to relax the pelvic floor. In turn, on exhalation, the pelvic floor is activated.

Practice 10-15 deep breaths throughout the day in lying or sitting



Pelvic Floor Exercises

It is important to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles help to support your bowel, bladder and uterus and manage your prolapse symptoms

Technique

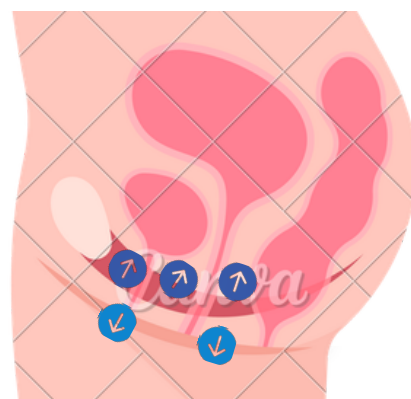
Before you start to strengthen it is important that you can relax your pelvic floor muscles. Practice this first, without holding, without counting; simply feel the muscle working and then relaxing.

Start with a small comfortable squeeze and build up your holding time and repetitions slowly over time.

- Gently squeeze shut your back passage (as if holding back wind), your vagina (as if gripping a tampon) and your bladder (as if stopping your flow of urine)
- Draw your pelvic floor inwards and upwards. Do this without tightening your buttocks, without holding your breath and without squeezing your legs together. ⬆️
- Release - let the muscle fully relax releasing all tension. ⬇️

Remember it takes time and consistent exercise for any muscle to strengthen and can take 3-6 months of exercise for these muscles to really strengthen.

It is important that you do your pelvic floor muscles exercises correctly. If you are having difficulty or not improving, ask to be referred to a specialist women's health physiotherapist or if postnatal, attend the physio postnatal class (details below)



'Magnificent 10'

Your aim is to be able to do 10 holds of 10 seconds each and 10 fast contractions. Three times a day. Start in lying and as able progress to sitting or standing

Begin by holding for a couple of seconds and gradually each week build-up to the 'magnificent 10'.

It is important that you keep breathing naturally whilst doing the exercises.

Give yourself time between squeezes to let go of the pelvic floor muscles completely.

Squeezy is a useful app by the NHS to help with your exercises. **Click the squeezy icon to download.**



Surgery

An operation may be appropriate for some women with prolapse. The main aim of surgery is to correct the vaginal bulge and improve the symptoms from the prolapse.

Whether you choose to have surgery will depend on how severe your symptoms are and how your prolapse affects your daily life. You may want to consider surgery if other options have not adequately helped.

If you plan to have children, you may choose to delay surgery until your family is complete.

Postnatal Prolapse

If you feel like you are experiencing symptoms of prolapse after having a baby, we first recommend you attend the online physiotherapy class Healthy Bodies After Birth.

The class takes place online every Friday morning from 11am

You can email our secretary for the link to the class and attend any Friday that suits you njordan@nmh.ie

You can also self-refer to the NMH Physiotherapy Service for the first six months following your delivery by contacting physio@nmh.ie

More information on prolapse can be found by clicking on or scanning this QR code to watch a short video from The Pelvic Floor Centre



HEALTHY BODIES AFTER BIRTH

An information session on caring and reconnecting with your body as it recovers after birth

Topics include:

- Bladder & Bowel Care
- Abdominal Care
- Pelvic Floor Advice
- Returning to Movement
- and more!

Every Friday at 11am



Online



Physiotherapist led information session
Email njordan@nmh.ie to book your place
www.nmh.ie

Physiotherapy Class

If you have been referred by your GP and are waiting to see your gynaecologist in The National Maternity Hospital you may attend an online physiotherapy session

Who Should Attend:

This session is for women experiencing:

- Bladder or bowel leakage
- Pelvic organ prolapse (e.g., bladder, uterus, rectum)
- Menopausal pelvic floor concerns
-

The session aims to provide you with practical advice to improve your bladder, bowel or prolapse symptoms

What to Expect:

- Lifestyle and behavioural strategies
- A better understanding of pelvic floor anatomy and function
- Common causes incontinence and prolapse
- Guided pelvic floor muscle exercises
- Advice on safe exercise
- Opportunity to ask questions and share experiences in a safe environment

The class runs monthly online, Email physio@nmh.ie to book your place.

Pelvic Health and Mental Wellbeing

Pelvic floor problems can deeply affect emotional, social, and psychological well-being. They may cause stress, anxiety, and feelings of embarrassment, leading to isolation or difficulty in your relationship.

Pelvic Health Ireland is a website made by doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, and women who have had pelvic health problems. It is here to help you learn about your body and your pelvic floor. Click on the icon below to access the website.

