



Prolapse, pessaries and physiotherapy

What is a prolapse?

Technically, it is a descent of the organs of the pelvis (bladder/bowel/uterus or vault if you have had a hysterectomy) into the walls of the vagina. This can give you symptoms of a bulge, heaviness, ache or dragging sensation, especially at the end of the day.

You might have found it hard to restart exercise or to have a big day in the garden. It can feel like there is tampon half in/half out of the vagina. You can have difficulty emptying your bladder or bowel, reduced sensation or deep pain with sex.

Alternatively, you might have no symptoms, but when you have a PAP smear, your doctor might say "you have a prolapse". If this is the case – Brilliant! Let's sort it out before you do have symptoms.

Why does it happen?

A prolapse can happen as a result of childbirth, with chronic constipation, or for all different reasons. Many things can be done to help manage, improve, or get rid of your symptoms totally.

A prolapse is a **soft tissue injury** (a bit like a sprained ankle), where symptoms can be made worse by increasing strain on the tissues, and can be made better, by decreasing strain.

Strain can be:

- "Tissue creep" (I know that sounds awful, but it's a technical term!) which is where your tissues get fatigued through the day – this is why sometimes pain, heaviness or discomfort can feel better in the morning and worse by the end of the day.
- Heavy lifting, lots of bending or pushing / pulling
- Constipation and repeated coughing
- Being significantly overweight

What are my options for treatment?

Physiotherapy with a specially trained continence and women's health physiotherapist is shown by evidence to be your first treatment option. I will question, assess (in lying AND standing) and together we will make a plan for your body. One such treatment option is a vaginal support pessary.

What is a pessary and what is it used for?

A pessary is a medical silicon device which can be worn to help support a prolapse in women. Fitting a pessary is an evidence-based conservative, low risk measure to help support the prolapse. It is similar to wearing a knee brace, if you had a ligament issue.



What are the benefits of wearing a pessary?

The purpose of wearing a pessary is so that you can do the things you want to do. You can choose to wear a pessary for certain activities, or you may prefer to wear it all the time.

Other benefits include, and research shows, that a pessary can;

- help you to continue doing the things you enjoy (e.g. sport, gardening)
- help with symptom-free daily living
- relieve symptoms, which can be worse by the end of the day
- improve self-image
- help pelvic floor exercises be more effective
- increase sexual satisfaction
- improve tissue structure (meaning that either the prolapse can improve, or at least not worsen).

If you have previously had pelvic floor physiotherapy and think you may like to try a vaginal support pessary immediately, do see your GP first for a referral to Rachel. If you would like to discuss it further, and re-try or try other treatments first, just book in online or call 03 6214 3333.