

Information for Patients

Pelvic Organ Prolapse – Management and Advice

Physiotherapy Service

What is Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

Pelvic organ prolapse occurs when a pelvic organ, such as the bladder or rectum, drops down from its normal position and pushes against the wall of the vagina (or in the case of the uterus, drops down in to the vagina).

Causes of Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Prolapse is primarily caused by laxity of the supporting structures i.e. ligaments of the pelvic organs (bladder, rectum, and uterus). It is a very common condition, especially in women who have had children.

Symptoms of Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Many women are unaware of the prolapse, but symptoms may/can include:

- Feeling a bulge, pressure or heaviness in the vagina
- Difficulty passing urine
- Urinary incontinence
- Difficulty emptying the bowel
- Faecal incontinence
- Difficulty retaining a tampon
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse

Types of Pelvic Organ Prolapse

The main types of prolapse are:

- **Front wall of the vagina**
This can be either the bladder (a **cystocele**) or the urethra — (a **urethrocele**).
- **Back wall of the vagina**
This can be either the rectum (a **rectocele**) or the small intestine (an **enterocele**).
- **Top part of the vagina**
This can be either the uterus, known as a **uterine prolapse**, or prolapse of the **vaginal vault**, the space left after hysterectomy.

It is possible to have more than one type of pelvic organ prolapse.

Management of Prolapse

Conservative management is the first line of treatment for any mild to moderate prolapse:

- Physiotherapy – pelvic floor exercises and lifestyle advice
- Pessary – ring or shelf
- Surgery – this option may be considered following conservative management or if the prolapse is severe. Prolapse can reoccur in approximately one in four women, even following surgery.
- **Pelvic Floor Muscle Training**
The main function of the pelvic floor is to support the contents of your pelvis. There is good evidence that pelvic floor muscle training may be able to ease symptoms of prolapse by:
 - Increasing your pelvic floor muscle strength and endurance by performing regular pelvic floor exercises.
 - Contracting your pelvic floor muscles during activities that increase your intra-abdominal pressure, such as coughing and lifting, this is known as functional bracing.
 - **Avoid constipation.** Straining to empty your bowel can make your prolapse worse. Try to make sure you eat the recommended five portions of fruit or vegetables each day. You should also drink about two litres of fluid daily. Further advice can be obtained from your physiotherapist, continence advisor, GP or Practice Nurse.
 - **Healthy weight.** Being a healthy weight for your height avoids unnecessary strain on your pelvic floor and could make a great difference to your prolapse symptoms – if you are overweight losing even a few pounds may help.
 - **Avoid heavy lifting.** Shopping, gardening, caring for babies, toddlers, etc. The list of day-to-day heavy tasks we often do is endless. Try to avoid heavy lifting where possible. If you cannot avoid it, try to lift less often and for short periods of time. Think about what you do - can you lift two lighter loads rather than one heavy load? It is important to use functional bracing in these occasions.
 - **Avoid excessive coughing.** If you have a respiratory condition such as asthma, ensure you are taking the correct prescribed medicine. If you smoke you should try to stop. Your GP, Practice Nurse or Stop Smoking Wales (Helpline: 0800 085 2219) can give further advice.
 - **Appropriate exercise.** Exercise like jogging or high impact aerobics should be avoided. Exercise where you always have one foot on the ground at any

given time is low impact and will put less pressure on your prolapse. Try swimming, pilates, yoga, walking or cycling instead.

Further information can be found at:

www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/866/pelvic-health-physiotherapy

Search for "Pelvic Health Physiotherapy ABUHB" in your internet browser



Scan the QR code for quick access via your Smartphone

"This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg"