



# Uterine prolapse

## Diagnosis

A diagnosis of uterine prolapse generally occurs during a pelvic exam.

During the pelvic exam your doctor is likely to ask you:

- To bear down as if having a bowel movement. Bearing down can help your doctor assess how far the uterus has slipped into the vagina.
- To tighten your pelvic muscles as if you're stopping a stream of urine. This test checks the strength of your pelvic muscles.

You might fill out a questionnaire that helps your doctor assess how uterine prolapse affects your quality of life. This information helps guide treatment decisions.

If you have severe incontinence, your doctor might recommend tests to measure how well your bladder functions (urodynamic testing).

## Treatment

Treatment depends on the severity of uterine prolapse. Your doctor might recommend:

- **Self-care measures.** If your uterine prolapse causes few or no symptoms, simple self-care measures may provide relief or help prevent worsening prolapse. Self-care measures include performing Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic muscles, losing weight and treating constipation.
- **Pessary.** A vaginal pessary is a plastic or rubber ring inserted into your vagina to support the bulging tissues. A pessary must be removed regularly for cleaning.

## Surgery

Your doctor might recommend surgery to repair uterine prolapse. Minimally invasive (laparoscopic) or vaginal surgery might be an option.

Surgery can involve:

- **Repair of weakened pelvic floor tissues.** This surgery is generally approached through the vagina but sometimes through the abdomen. The surgeon might graft your own tissue, donor tissue or a synthetic material onto weakened pelvic floor structures to support your pelvic organs.

- **Removal of your uterus (hysterectomy).** Hysterectomy might be recommended for uterine prolapse in certain instances. A hysterectomy is generally very safe, but with any surgery comes the risk of complications.

Talk with your doctor about all your treatment options to be sure you understand the risks and benefits of each so that you can choose what's best for you.

## Lifestyle and home remedies

Depending on the severity of your uterine prolapse, self-care measures may provide relief. Try to:

- Perform Kegel exercises to strengthen pelvic muscles and support the weakened fascia
- Avoid constipation by eating high-fiber foods and drinking plenty of fluids
- Avoid bearing down to move your bowels
- Avoid heavy lifting
- Control coughing
- Lose weight if you're overweight or obese

### Kegel exercises

Kegel exercises strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. A strong pelvic floor provides better support for your pelvic organs, prevents prolapse from worsening and relieves symptoms associated with uterine prolapse.

To perform Kegel exercises:

- Tighten (contract) your pelvic floor muscles as though you were trying to prevent passing gas.
- Hold the contraction for five seconds, and then relax for five seconds. If this is too difficult, start by holding for two seconds and relaxing for three seconds.
- Work up to holding the contractions for 10 seconds at a time.
- Aim for at least three sets of 10 repetitions each day.

Kegel exercises may be most successful when they're taught by a physical therapist and reinforced with biofeedback. Biofeedback involves using monitoring devices that help ensure you're tightening the muscles properly for the best length of time.

Once you've learned the proper method, you can do Kegel exercises discreetly just about anytime, whether you're sitting at your desk or relaxing on the couch.

## Preparing for your appointment

You may be referred to a gynecologist.

Here's some information to help you get ready for your appointment.

### What you can do

- List symptoms you've been having, and for how long

- List all medications, vitamins and supplements you take, including the doses
- List key personal and medical information, including other conditions, recent life changes and stressors
- Prepare questions to ask your doctor

For uterine prolapse, some basic questions to ask your doctor include:

- What can I do at home to ease my symptoms?
- What are the chances that the prolapse will worsen if I don't do anything?
- What treatment approach do you recommend?
- What's the likelihood that the uterine prolapse will recur if I have it surgically treated?
- What are the risks of surgery?

During your appointment, don't hesitate to ask other questions as they occur to you.

## What to expect from your doctor

Your doctor is likely to ask you a number of questions, including:

- What symptoms are you experiencing?
- When did you first notice your symptoms? Have they worsened over time?
- Do you have pelvic pain?
- Do you ever leak urine?
- Have you had a severe or ongoing cough?
- Do you do any heavy lifting in your job or daily activities?
- Do you strain during bowel movements?
- Has anyone in your family ever had uterine prolapse or any other pelvic problems?
- How many children have you given birth to? Were your deliveries vaginal?
- Do you plan to have children in the future?

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