



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Vaginal Pessary for Vaginal Prolapse

Issued by Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

You have been given this leaflet to answer some of the questions you may have about having a vaginal pessary fitted or changed. It explains what a pelvic organ prolapse is, the benefits and the risks of having a pessary in place and advice and support in case any complications arise.

What is a pelvic organ prolapse?

Prolapse is a term that refers to any organ of the body that has moved from its usual position, in gynaecology this means bulging of one or more of the pelvic organs into the vagina. These organs are the uterus, vagina, bowel and bladder.

What causes a prolapse?

There are a number of reasons why you may develop a prolapse. Childbirth and pregnancy can weaken the supportive structures within the pelvis. The ageing process and changes in hormone levels at, or after the menopause, alongside other factors, can reduce the pelvic floor muscle strength. If you are overweight, carry out very heavy physical work, smoke or suffer with chronic chest conditions that cause you to cough or have chronic constipation these can increase your risk of developing a prolapse. This is due to the additional strain that this places on the muscles and ligaments of the pelvis.

What is a vaginal pessary?

A vaginal pessary is a plastic or silicone device which is inserted into the vagina to support a prolapsed womb or vaginal walls. A doctor or specialist nurse will decide which pessary is most suitable for you depending on which type of prolapse you have and the size of the prolapse.

What are the benefits of having a pessary?

Having a pessary inserted will not cure your prolapse, but it may help with the symptoms and make you feel more comfortable. The pessary will help you to continue your everyday activities such as exercising, working and hobbies.

How is a pessary fitted?

Before you have a pessary fitted, you will have a consultation with a gynaecologist, they will discuss the options for managing a prolapse, which include fitting a pessary, surgery or managing your prolapse without any intervention. An examination will be performed and this will allow the doctor to grade your prolapse and to find out which type and size of pessary will help your prolapse. It may take more than one fitting to find the correct type and size of pessary for you. The pessary is placed into your vagina and moved into place to sit behind the pubic bone. It will take about 30 seconds to put it in and get it in the right place. You may feel some discomfort when it is inserted, but it should not be painful.

Following the first fitting of the pessary you will be asked to have a walk around the department and go to the toilet to pass urine before going home. If the pessary is in the correct position, you should not be able to feel it. Once you feel comfortable with your pessary, and you have passed urine, you can go home and will be able to carry on with your normal daily activities.

How often should a pessary be changed?

A vaginal pessary will normally be changed in the nurse led pessary clinic at your local hospital. An appointment will be sent out in the post approximately every 4-6 months. If you feel your pessary is due to be changed and you have not received a letter,

you should call the contact centre, on the number below, to enquire about your appointment.

When attending the nurse led pessary clinic you will be asked if you have had any problems with your pessary since your last appointment. Your pessary will be removed and an examination will be performed if required to check for any problems, such as any bleeding, ulcers or infection in the vagina or cervix. If there are no complications your pessary will be replaced. It is important to attend all your appointments to minimise risk of any problems occurring.

How long will you need a pessary for?

A pessary can be used as a temporary measure, for example if you are waiting for surgery to repair the prolapse, or it can be used indefinitely if you do not wish to undergo surgery, or where surgery may not be safe for health reasons. Also if you plan to have children surgery may not be an option.

Can I have sexual intercourse with a vaginal pessary in place?

It is possible to have a vaginal pessary and to continue having sexual intercourse, depending on the type of pessary in place. Please discuss this with your health professional as depending on the type of pessary in place we may be able to teach you how to remove and replace it as necessary.

What are the risks involved?

There are a few side effects and risks and your doctor or nurse will also discuss these during your consultation. The most common risks are:

- an increase in the amount of vaginal discharge, this is normal if it remains white or clear in colour, with no smell
- you may have some vaginal irritation
- difficulty passing urine
- a change in the colour/odour of your vaginal discharge
- your pessary may fall out
- abnormal vaginal bleeding

What to do if you have a problem with your pessary:

If you experience any problems with your pessary please ring the call centre for the earliest available appointment on the number below or your GP may be able to remove the pessary until you can get a clinic appointment.

Useful telephone numbers:

For the next available appointment please ring the Contact Centre on 0344 811 8111.

For advice and support for emergency or urgent care call 111.

Further information can also be obtained on the NHS Choices website.

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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