

What Is a Pessary and What Is It Used For?

A pessary is a device most often made of silicone that fits inside the vagina (birth canal), to help support pelvic organ prolapse. A pelvic organ prolapse occurs when the muscles and ligaments that support the pelvic organs have stretched or become weak enough that they no longer properly support the organs, causing them to droop, bulge, or protrude (stick out) out of the vagina.

You may hear your type of prolapse called one of the following:

- **Cystocele** – A bulge of the bladder into the vagina.
- **Rectocele** – A bulge of the rectum into the vagina.
- **Uterine prolapse** – A bulge of the uterus (womb) into the vagina.
- **Urethral prolapse** – A rare condition, where the urethra (tube that urine passes through) protrudes through the external urethral meatus (opening).

The natural support of the pelvic muscles can be weakened by childbirth, obesity, surgery, chronic constipation, chronic cough, and repeated heavy lifting. Additionally, there are some pessaries that can also help with urinary leakage (incontinence).

Types and Choice of Pessaries

There are several different shapes, as well as multiple sizes of pessaries. After a full exam of the vagina, your provider will decide which pessary is best for you. Pessary choice is based on the type and size of prolapse that you have, and your unique body shape and size. A correctly fitting pessary should support your prolapse

and be comfortable for you to wear. Fitting the correct pessary can take multiple attempts with different sized pessaries to find the one that is the best fit for you. Once the pessary is in place and before you go home, your provider may have you walk around the office and also try to empty your bladder. If there is no discomfort with either of these activities, you will be sent home with the pessary in place. You may need to return to the office every few months to have the pessary checked.

Care of the Pessary

Depending on the type of pessary you have, you may be able to care for the pessary yourself. At your follow up visit, you will be taught how to remove, clean and re-insert the pessary. Most pessaries can be worn for weeks at a time before they need to be taken out and cleaned with soap and water. If you are unable to remove, clean, or re-insert the pessary, you will need return to the office at regular (every 2 to 3 month) intervals to have the pessary removed and cleaned by your provider. Failure to come in for regular checkups may increase your risk for having problems with your pessary which include infection, pain, or bleeding.

Movement of the Pessary

The pessary cannot get lost in your body. The vagina is a closed tube, so the pessary cannot go anywhere else in the body. However, it is possible for the pessary to move inside the vagina. It may even fall out. Your provider will show you how to push the pessary back into place if it begins to come out. If the pessary falls out, it may mean it is not the correct size or type, and you may need to be re-fitted with a different one.

Common Changes with Pessary Use

These are some common changes that you may see or feel with pessary use:

Normal

- A small amount of white discharge when wearing a pessary.

Abnormal

- Foul smelling vaginal discharge.
- Vaginal irritation – may need to use vaginal estrogen.
- Difficulty urinating or having a bowel movement.
- Vaginal bleeding.

Urine leakage a pessary may make your urine leakage worse or you may notice you may begin to leak urine especially when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Report this to your provider as a different type of pessary or additional therapies may be needed.

The pessary may come down or come out. Constipation may make your pessary more likely to come out or come down due to straining with bowel movement. Speak to your provider about how to manage any constipation you may have. If your pessary continues to come down or out call your provider for an appointment as you may need a different type or size of pessary.

Additional Information on Wearing a Pessary

- Some pessaries can be worn during vaginal intercourse – Ask your provider about this.
- The pessary may fit too loose or too small during different times of your cycle. If this happens you may need to keep two different size pessaries on hand to help with this.

When to Call Your Provider

- If you lose or gain more than 10 pounds, you may need to have your pessary re-fitted.
- If you have trouble passing urine or having a bowel movement.
- If you notice vaginal bleeding while wearing the pessary.
- If you are having discomfort.

It is important to have regular exams even though your pessary is comfortable, and you are having no symptoms. Ask your provider how often you should be seen to have your pessary checked.¹ Make sure all of your providers know you are wearing a pessary. Consider wearing a Med-alert bracelet if you are afraid you might forget to remind your health providers and family if needed.

Finally, keep all scheduled follow-up appointments with your provider. This will allow your provider to examine you to be sure the pessary is working properly.

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1. O'Dell K & Atnip S Pessary Care: Follow up and management of complications. Urologic Nursing, 2012; 32 (3) 126-130. (Seminal article)

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