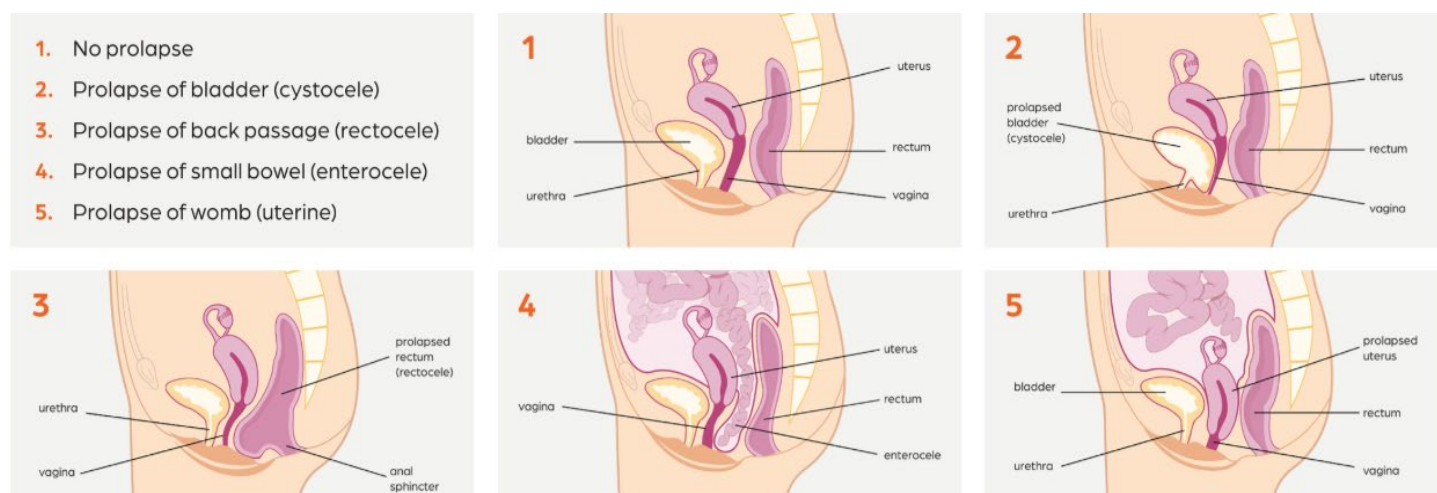


# Vaginal Pessary for Prolapse

## Patient Information – Urology Service

### What is a prolapse?

A prolapse is the term used to describe the structures supporting the uterus, vagina or rectum becoming weakened or damaged and no longer providing adequate support. This creates a bulge that pushes into the vagina and results in symptoms such as a feeling of fullness in the vagina, frequent urination, and difficulty with passing urine or stool.

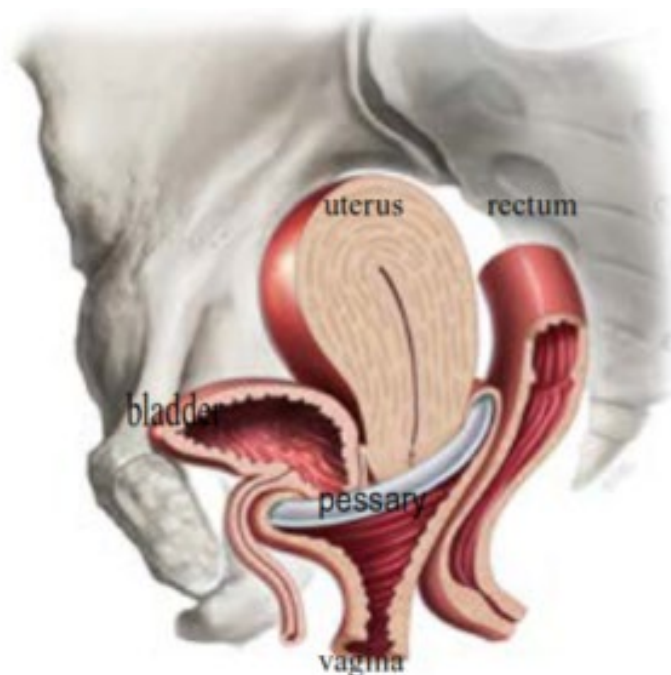


A number of different factors can contribute to developing a prolapse, including:

- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Ageing and menopause
- Lifestyle factors – frequent constipation, smoking, being overweight
- Chronic heavy lifting
- Previous pelvic surgery
- Family history of prolapse.

### What is a vaginal pessary?

A vaginal pessary is a removable device made of silicone that is fitted into your vagina to support the weakened and prolapsed walls of the vagina or uterus.



## What are the benefits of a pessary?

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A pessary may ease your symptoms and make you feel more comfortable. Some women find their symptoms go away completely.

For some women it can be used as a long-term management option. For others, it can be used to make you more comfortable while you are waiting for surgery.

## What are the side effects of a pessary?

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A properly fitted pessary should not cause you any pain or discomfort. You should be able to carry out your usual daily activities.

You may notice more vaginal discharge than usual, due to vaginal irritation. This discharge is a normal consequence of having the pessary in place. If you have passed menopause, usually vaginal oestrogen cream or a vaginal tablet can be used once or twice a week to improve the condition of your vaginal wall tissues and reduce the risk of irritation.

If you feel the pessary is not working well, it can easily be removed.

To avoid issues with the pessary, it is important to have regular checks. The frequency of the check-ups depends on the type of pessary and your ability to manage it independently. When you are not managing the pessary on your own, the frequency of changes is every six to nine months. The changes become annual when you can regularly take them in and out yourself.

The greatest risk associated with using pessaries is the forgotten pessary. Receiving frequent checks will ensure they continue to be an effective way of managing your prolapse.

Complications can include ulceration, pain, infection, and difficulties with removal of the pessary.

## What kind of pessary will I need?

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There are several different types and sizes of pessary available. The most common are a ring pessary that can be fitted with or without support, a Gellhorn, cubes and shaatz pessaries.

The doctor or physiotherapist will decide which pessary is the most suitable for you.

It may be necessary to try different options at your first or subsequent appointments to find the best type and size of pessary for you.

## How is a pessary fitted?

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You can have your pessary fitted by:

- Your GP
- Another GP that your GP has referred you to
- Urology or Gynaecology doctor
- Women's Health Physiotherapist at Christchurch Women's Hospital
- Continence Nurse in the Urology Service.

Whoever fits your pessary will talk to you about your symptoms so you can decide which type of pessary is best for you. You will also have a vaginal examination to decide the size of pessary that you need.

They will insert the pessary into your vagina and position it to sit comfortably. You will be asked to walk around for a few minutes and to empty your bladder. This will help them determine whether you have the correct pessary.

It is not unusual for the first pessary fitted to fall out. This is not an urgent issue, and another can be fitted at a later appointment. If this does happen, please contact the clinic where it was fitted.

- Gynaecology Outpatients (03) 364 4440
- Urology Outpatients (03) 364 1176
- Your GP.



Ring pessary in place



Gellhorn pessary in place



Cube pessary in place

## How often does a pessary need to be checked?

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This depends on which type of pessary you were fitted with. The clinic staff will advise you on how often your pessary will need to be changed and who will do this.

General guidelines are:

### **Ring pessary**

This is usually checked every six to nine months. Your GP will do this for you and check that your vaginal skin is healthy with no ulceration or infection.

### **Gellhorn or shaatz pessary**

This is checked at the hospital every six to nine months. You will be sent an appointment for this.

### **Cube pessary**

You need to remove, wash, and replace this type of pessary regularly. The clinic staff will explain how to do this and how frequently. Ideally, the cube pessary should be removed each evening. If you regularly take your pessary in and out yourself, then the check-ups are every 12 months.

It is important that you have regular checks, either at your GP or at the clinic where it was fitted, to avoid complications.

## **After my pessary is fitted?**

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### **What do I need to do after I have a pessary fitted?**

Regularly apply oestrogen cream, which the doctor will prescribe.

Have regular check-ups, approximately every six to nine months.

### **Can I wear a pessary during sexual intercourse?**

Some types of pessaries are fine to wear during intercourse while other types need to be removed beforehand.

The doctor or clinician will advise you about the type of pessary you have and what you need to do. Be reassured though that having a pessary does not mean that you have to stop sexual activity.

### **Who do I contact if I am worried or have a problem?**

If you have any problems with your pessary or concerns about it, please see your GP or clinician who inserted the pessary in the first instance.

## **Alternative treatment options**

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If your prolapse is not causing you any problems, you do not need to do anything.

Physiotherapy has been found to improve prolapse symptoms through supervised pelvic floor muscle exercises and lifestyle advice.

If you have tried other options without much success, you may wish to discuss surgical management with your doctor.

## Contact information

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If you have any concerns or questions, please call one of our Continence Nurse Specialists on (03) 364 0541 or (03) 364 1008, or Women's Health Physiotherapist on (03) 364 4699, depending on who fitted the pessary.

For more information about:

- Hospital and specialist services, go to [www.healthnz.govt.nz/hospitals-services/hospitals/canterbury](http://www.healthnz.govt.nz/hospitals-services/hospitals/canterbury)
- Your health and medication, go to [www.healthnz.govt.nz/health-topics](http://www.healthnz.govt.nz/health-topics)
- NZ Continence Association, go to [www.continence.org.nz](http://www.continence.org.nz)

For information on parking, how to get to the hospital, and visiting hours, please visit the [Christchurch Hospital](#) website.