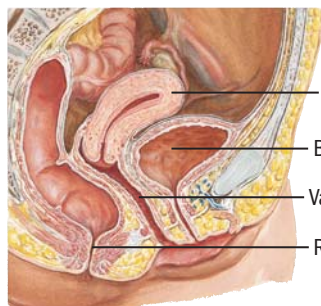


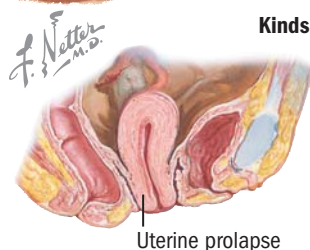
MANAGING YOUR PELVIC ORGAN PROLAPSE

Normal location of organs

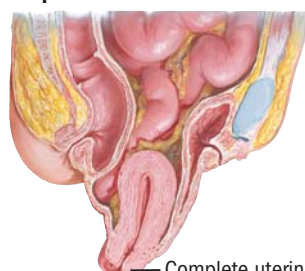


The uterus, bladder, and rectum near the vaginal canal can push through (prolapse, or bulge) into this canal. A bulging uterus is called uterine prolapse. A bladder prolapse is a cystocele. A prolapsed rectum is a rectocele.

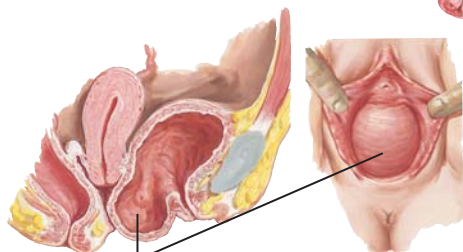
Kinds of prolapses



Uterine prolapse



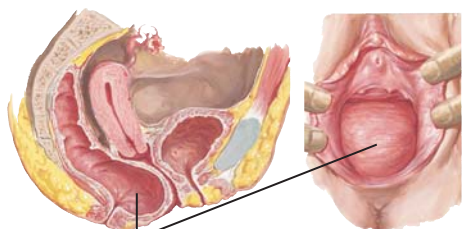
Complete uterine prolapse



Bladder prolapse (cystocele)



Symptoms include pelvic pressure or pain, low backache, feeling that something is falling out or bulging, and bowel movement or bladder problems. Most rectoceles occur in women, but men may also have them.



Rectal prolapse (rectocele)



The most common cause is childbirth, because it stretches muscles that support pelvic organs. Other causes are aging, menopause, being overweight, heavy lifting, long-lasting cough, straining during bowel movements, and cancers.



What Is Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

The uterus, bladder, and rectum near the vaginal canal can push through (prolapse) into this canal. A bulging uterus is called uterine prolapse. A bladder prolapse is a cystocele. A prolapsed rectum is a rectocele. The prolapsed organ can cause tissue to bulge out of the vagina. Women may first notice something like a ball of tissue coming out of the vagina. Most rectoceles occur in women. Rarely, men may have rectoceles.

What Causes Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

The most common cause is childbirth because it stretches muscles that support pelvic organs. Normal aging and menopause (change of life) contribute to prolapse. Levels of estrogen, which strengthen muscles near the bladder, rectum, and vagina, decrease with menopause. Being overweight, lifting heavy objects, having long-lasting cough, straining during bowel movements (from constipation), and cancers also cause prolapses.

What Are the Symptoms of Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

Mild or moderate prolapses may cause pelvic pressure, low backache, pain, or feeling that something is falling out. Urine may leak, especially with coughing, sneezing, or laughing. Rectoceles can cause bowel movement problems.

Severe prolapses also cause a feeling of fullness in the abdomen (belly) or a bulge that may go away when lying down. Other symptoms are problems emptying the bladder or having bowel movements, pelvic pain, abdominal discomfort, urgent or painful urination, and problems during sex.

How Is Pelvic Organ Prolapse Diagnosed?

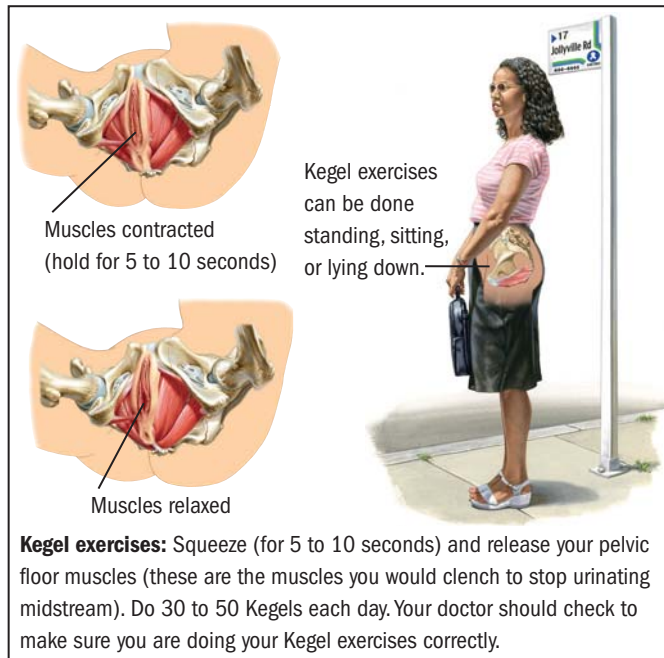
The doctor will make a diagnosis from a physical examination, including a pelvic exam. Urine and blood tests may be done. Ultrasonography and voiding cystogram (cystourethrogram) may also be done. The cystogram is an x-ray taken during urination to show bladder shape.

MANAGING YOUR PELVIC ORGAN PROLAPSE



Pessary

Mild to moderate prolapses without symptoms need no treatment. Kegel exercises can be done to tighten pelvic floor muscles and strengthen muscles supporting the bladder and vagina. More severe prolapses with organ bulges need treatment, such as a pessary, hormone replacement therapy, and surgery.



Avoid straining during bowel movements, heavy lifting, coughing, and constipation.



Lose weight if you're overweight.

How Is Pelvic Organ Prolapse Treated?

More severe prolapses with pelvic organ bulges need treatment. Mild to moderate prolapses (no organ bulges) and no symptoms need no treatment, just watching. Straining during bowel movements, heavy lifting, coughing, and constipation should be avoided. Eating high-fiber foods can help constipation. Kegel exercises involve tightening pelvic floor muscles and can help symptoms. These exercises strengthen muscles supporting the bladder and vagina. If Kegel exercises don't help, physical therapy (biofeedback, electrical stimulation) may. If all these treatments don't work, a pessary (plastic or rubber ring fitted into the vagina) can hold the bladder in place. Women after menopause may take hormone replacement therapy to help strengthen muscles. Surgery can be done when the pessary doesn't fit properly or if there is more than one prolapsed organ. Surgery may hold the bladder in the correct position.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Pelvic Organ Prolapse:

- ✓ **DO** Kegel exercises as directed. Do them when you lift anything heavy (books, luggage, groceries, baby) or when you cough, sneeze, or laugh.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have trouble emptying your bladder, you see vaginal bleeding, or your pessary falls out or isn't comfortable.
- ✓ **DO** eat a healthy diet with lots of fiber, fruits, and vegetables and drink plenty of liquids to prevent constipation.
- ✓ **DO** treat chronic cough. Don't smoke. Smoking can cause chronic cough.
- ✓ **DO** keep to a healthy body weight.
- ⊗ **DON'T** lift heavy objects (more than 20 to 25 pounds).

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- Tel: (202) 638-5577
- Website: <http://www.acog.org>