

PESSARY

Patient Fact Sheet

What is a pessary and what is it used for?

A pessary is a device that fits into your vagina (birth canal) to help support a pelvic organ prolapse (or bulge from the vagina). Pelvic organ prolapse is a condition in which the natural support of muscles and ligaments has failed causing a droop, bulge, or falling out of some or all of the organs of the pelvis. These organs include the uterus (womb), vagina (birth canal), bladder (where the urine is stored), urethra (tube the urine passes thorough) and rectum (the lower part of the large intestines where bowel movements are stored). The natural support can be weakened by childbirth, pelvic surgery, obesity, chronic constipation, chronic coughing and repeated heavy lifting. Additionally, some pessaries can help with urine leakage problems (called incontinence).

What kind of pessary is available?

There are over a dozen different shapes of pessaries and each shape of pessary has multiple sizes. Your practitioner will decide which type and size of pessary is best for you. Pessary choice is made based on the type and degree of prolapse or bulge you have. The fit of the pessary has to be just right and there are no tools that can tell which pessary is perfect for you. Finding the correct pessary is often done by trial and error and several tries to get the right one for you may be necessary. Prior to leaving the office after your pessary fitting, your practitioner may ask you to walk around for a few minutes and ask you to empty your bladder. You will need to return to the office periodically to have the pessary checked.

How do I care for my pessary?

That depends on the shape of pessary and your ability to take care of the pessary yourself. At your follow-up visit, you may be taught self-care of the pessary. This will include self-removal, cleaning techniques and self-insertion. Most pessaries can be worn for many days to weeks at a time

before they have to taken out and cleaned with ordinary soap and water. If you are unable to take care of the pessary yourself, you will be instructed to return to the office at scheduled intervals for practitioner care.

Can a pessary get lost or fall out?

Your vagina is a closed tube; therefore, it cannot go anywhere else in your body. It is possible for the pessary to fall out or shift in your vagina. This can mean that the pessary is not the correct size and may need to be refitted.

Are there any side effects that can occur with pessary use?

You may notice more vaginal discharge; this is normal. The vaginal discharge may develop an odor; this can be treated with various vaginal medications. Vaginal irritation is another possible side effect; menopausal women may be prescribed vaginal estrogen to decrease vaginal irritation. Rarely, the pessary can cause difficulties in emptying your bladder or having adequate bowel movements.

What else should I know about a pessary?

Some pessaries can be worn during vaginal intercourse – your practitioner can advise you on this. Many women find that the pessary “fits differently” (too small – feels loose or too big – feels tight) during different times in their cycle. Self-care patients can alleviate this by having a smaller or bigger pessary on hand to use. It is recommended if you lose or gain more than 10 lbs. and you experience problems with your pessary, you be refitted. Most important, contact your practitioner if you have any discomfort related to the pessary, if you have trouble urinating or having a bowel movement and if you have any vaginal bleeding. Finally, keep your scheduled appointments with your practitioner. This will ensure the best outcomes for you.

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