

Pelvic Support Problems

General Information

Pelvic support problems can happen when your pelvic floor muscles become weak.

Pelvic floor muscles are several layers of muscles between your legs at the bottom of your pelvic area. These muscles support your uterus (womb), small intestine, bladder and colon. Pelvic floor muscles also keep your pelvic organs in place so they work correctly.

When these muscles become weak, your pelvic organs can drop or fall into your vagina.

Causes

Pelvic support problems happen when the pelvic floor muscles become weak and are stretched. This can be caused by one or more of the following:

- aging
- pregnancy and childbirth
- menopause
- being overweight.

Types

There are many types of pelvic support problems. Here are some of the most common types:

■ Cystocele

- This happens when the wall of tissue between your vagina and bladder becomes weak and allows the bladder to hang down into the vagina.
- Symptoms may include one or more of the following:
 - feeling like something is falling out of your vagina
 - leaking urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or put other pressure on your bladder (stress urinary incontinence)
 - vaginal discomfort or pain when having sex

■ Rectocele

- This happens when the wall of tissue between your rectum and vagina becomes weak and allows the rectum to hang down into the back wall of the vagina.
- Symptoms may include one or more of the following:
 - feeling like something is falling out of your vagina
 - trouble having bowel movements
 - vaginal discomfort or pain when having sex

(over)

■ Enterocele

- This happens when the wall of tissue that holds the small intestine (bowel) in place becomes weak and allows the small intestine to hang down into the vagina.
- Symptoms may include one or more of the following:
 - feeling of fullness
 - feeling like something is falling out of your vagina
 - pelvic pressure or pain
 - low back pain
 - vaginal discomfort or pain when having sex

■ Uterine Prolapse

- This happens when the uterus falls or slides into the vagina.
- Symptoms may include one or more of the following:
 - feeling like something is falling out of your vagina
 - pelvic pressure or pain
 - low back pain
 - vaginal discomfort or pain when having sex
 - no symptoms

■ Vaginal Prolapse

- This happens when the top of the vagina loses support and drops. This can often happen after a hysterectomy.
- Symptoms may include one or more of the following:
 - trouble having bowel movements
 - feeling of fullness
 - feeling like something is falling out of your vagina
 - pelvic pressure or pain
 - low back pain
 - vaginal discomfort or pain when having sex.

Treatment

To help reduce your symptoms, your health care provider may have you:

- lose weight
- exercise
- quit smoking
- change your diet
- limit the amount of caffeine you have.

Other treatment options may include:

- **vaginal pessary.** This is a stiff ring inserted into your vagina by a health care provider. It presses against the wall of your vagina and nearby urethra to reposition it.
- **Kegel exercises.** These exercises can help you strengthen your pelvic floor muscles and regain bladder control. Your health care provider can help you learn how to do the exercises the right way.
- **medicine.** Your health care provider may prescribe medicine to treat urinary or bowel problems you may have.
- **surgery.** Your health care provider may recommend surgery to treat your pelvic support problem. He or she will discuss this treatment option with you.

Information adapted from The National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse