



WHAT IS PELVIC FLOOR PROLAPSE?

The pelvic floor muscles are a series of muscles that form a sling or hammock across the opening of the pelvis. These muscles, together with their surrounding tissue, are responsible for keeping all the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus, urethra and rectum) in place and functioning correctly.

For example, they normally tighten to help control the release of urine from the bladder.

When the muscles of the pelvic floor are damaged or weakened by overstretching, they are sometimes unable to support the weight of some or all of the pelvic organs. When this happens, one or more of the pelvic organs may drop below their normal positions, causing symptoms that range from mild discomfort to significant pain and disturbance of normal function.

Pelvic prolapse is a general term that refers to the displacement of any or all of the affected pelvic organs. Uterine prolapse refers specifically to the dropping of the uterus down into the vagina. When the bladder drops from its normal place in the vagina, it is called a cystocele. When the rectum bulges into or out of the vagina it is called a rectocele. The bulging or herniation of the small bowel (intestine) into the space between the vagina and the rectum is an enterocele. These distinctions are important because their symptoms and treatment options differ.

What causes pelvic floor prolapse?

Childbirth is the most common cause of the damage to the pelvic floor. Other factors include past surgery such as hysterectomy, lowering of oestrogen levels due to menopause, and conditions that cause chronically raised abdominal pressure such as chronic constipation, coughing and heavy lifting.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of pelvic floor prolapse depend on the type and severity of the prolapse. In mild conditions you may not be aware of any problems at all. When prolapse is moderate or severe, symptoms may include the sensation of a lump or dragging discomfort inside the vagina, or a disturbance in the function of the affected pelvic organ. For example, if the bladder is affected you may experience incontinence and/or frequent urine infections. When the bowel is affected you may experience low back pain, constipation or incomplete emptying. There may also be pain or discomfort during sexual intercourse, and protrusion of the vagina and/or uterus of the vaginal opening.

Again, this is fairly common and happens to around one in ten women. If you feel a bulge or a dull heavy sensation in your vagina you may be experiencing a prolapse. **It's best to consult your doctor to be sure.**

