

Pessary

A pessary is a soft, flexible, silicone-based device that is placed into the vagina to help support dropped pelvic organs, such as the uterus, rectum, and/or bladder. Pessaries are made in many different shapes and sizes.

A pessary is a non-surgical way to treat pelvic organ prolapse, and sometimes, urinary incontinence.

Types of Pelvic Support Problems

- Cystocele – Bladder drops from its normal pelvic position, creating a bulge into or out of the vagina.
- Rectocele – Rectum drops from its normal pelvic position, creating a bulge into or out of the vagina.
- Uterine Prolapse – Uterus slides down from its normal pelvic position into the vaginal canal or beyond the vaginal opening.
- Vaginal vault prolapse with enterocele – After hysterectomy, the top of the vagina slides down (usually pushed down by the small intestines) into the vaginal canal or beyond the vaginal opening.

If you choose a pessary for treatment, your provider may fit you with different pessary sizes or types to find the best fit.

Pessary Fit

The pessary fits correctly if:

- The pessary does not feel uncomfortable.
- You bear down and the pessary stays in place.
- You have no difficulty urinating or having a bowel movement.

Some pessaries may be removed and reinserted at home. Those patients who are interested in learning how to remove and reinsert their pessary themselves will be instructed how to do this.

The majority of postmenopausal women will be instructed to use vaginal estrogen in order to prevent injury to the vaginal tissue from the pessary. The estrogen makes the lining of the vagina thicker and healthier. Your provider will order this medication, if needed.

Pessary Insertion

- You may be taught how to insert and remove your pessary. These instructions may vary depending on your particular type of pessary. The following refer to a ring-shaped pessary:

- Before inserting the pessary, wash both your hands and the pessary thoroughly with soap and water. Rinse and dry. Fold the pessary in half, at the indented areas within the ring, and hold the tip with your dominant hand. Apply a water-based lubricant to the other tip of your folded pessary. Place your opposite foot on a chair, low stool, or toilet. Lean over this leg. Insert the folded pessary into the vagina (long ways) as far back as you can. It will open up into its normal shape when you let go of the ring. Use your index finger to push the pessary back behind the pubic bone.
- Some women prefer to insert the pessary lying down. If so, lie down in bed. Bend your knees. Hold pessary as stated above and insert. You may also choose to insert the pessary by sitting over the edge of a chair.

Pessary Removal

- Use the same position as with the insertion.
- Insert index finger into the vagina and find the rim of the pessary.
- Hook finger under rim, or through one of the holes.
- Bear down like you are having a bowel movement, and then pull the pessary down and out.
- The ring will not fold up completely, but the vaginal walls will stretch to allow removal.

Care of the Pessary

- If you are able to, we recommend that you remove and clean your pessary daily. Clean with mild soap and water, allow to completely air-dry overnight, then reinsert it into the vagina. It is safe to keep your pessary in for a longer period of time, but always discuss the appropriate time until removal with your provider.
- If you care for your own pessary, you will come to the office for an examination initially in 2 weeks, and then every 3 months. After one year of use, you may follow-up 2 to 3 times annually.
- Occasionally, the pessary can fall out with a bowel movement. If the pessary falls into the toilet, clean it with soap and water, and then soak it in rubbing alcohol for 20 minutes. After this, soak it for 20 minutes in water, and then wash again with soap and water. Rinse well. You may then reinsert it into the vagina.
- If you are unable to remove and reinsert your own pessary, we will want to see you in the office for cleaning and examination every three months.

When to Call Your Provider

- Vaginal bleeding
- Foul smelling vaginal discharge
- Pelvic pain or pressure
- Difficulty going to the bathroom or inability to go at all
- Vaginal irritation or itching sensation in the vaginal area
- If the pessary falls out
- Unusual swelling or tenderness, fever, pains, or cramps in the lower abdomen