

# Vaginal Pessary for Prolapse

## Patient Information – CDHB

### What is a vaginal pessary?

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- A vaginal pessary is a silicone removable device that fits into your vagina to help support a pelvic organ prolapse. It does this by adding support to the walls of your vagina.
- A properly fitted pessary should not cause you any pain or discomfort.

### Why do I need a pessary?

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- Your uterus, bladder or rectum have bulged into your vagina. This happens when the pelvic ligaments and tissues are damaged and no longer support the pelvic organs. This is called a pelvic organ prolapse.
- Prolapse can be caused by things such as:
  - Childbirth and pregnancy
  - Ageing and the menopause
  - Lifestyle factors such as frequent constipation, smoking and being overweight
  - A lot of heavy lifting
  - Previous pelvic surgery
  - Family history of prolapse

### What are the benefits of a pessary?

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- It may ease your symptoms and make you feel more comfortable. Some women's symptoms go away completely.
- It can be a long-term management option
- It can be used to make you more comfortable while you are waiting for surgery.

### What are the side effects?

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- For most women who have a pessary there are no side effects.
- You may notice more vaginal discharge, due to vaginal irritation. If you have passed the menopause, usually vaginal oestrogen cream or a vaginal tablet is used once or twice weekly to improve the condition of your vaginal wall tissues and reduce the risk of irritation
- To avoid issues it is important to have regular checks, usually every six to nine months as long-term pessary use can cause damage to the skin of the vagina, ulceration or other problems such as infection.

### What kind of pessary will I need?

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- There are a number of different types and sizes of pessary, eg. ring pessary, gellhorn pessary and cube pessary.
- The doctor/physiotherapist will decide which pessary is most suitable for you.

- It may be necessary to try different options at your first or subsequent appointments, to find the best type and size of pessary for you.
- It is not unusual for the first pessary fitted to fall out, this is not an urgent issue, and another can be fitted at a later appointment. If this does happen, please contact the clinic where it was fitted.

Gynaecology Outpatients (03) 364 4426  
Urology Outpatients (03) 364 0541

Family Planning (03) 379 0514  
Your GP

## How is a pessary fitted?

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- You can have your vaginal pessary fitted by:
  - your GP
  - another GP your GP has referred you to
  - family planning clinic doctor
  - doctor at Christchurch Women's Hospital or the urology department
  - Women's Health Physiotherapist at Christchurch Women's Hospital
  - nurse in the urology department
- They will talk to you about your symptoms to decide which type of pessary is best for you.
- You will have a vaginal examination to decide the size of pessary you need.
- They will insert the pessary into your vagina and position it to sit comfortably.
- You will be asked to walk about for a few minutes and to empty your bladder.
- This will help them to tell whether you have the correct pessary.
- A properly fitted pessary should not cause you any pain or discomfort.
- Once you feel comfortable with your pessary, you will be able to go home. You should be able to carry out your usual daily activities.



Ring pessary in place



Gellhorn pessary in place



Cube pessary in place

## How often does a pessary need to be checked?

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- This depends on which type of pessary you have. The clinic staff will advise you on how often your pessary will need to be changed and who will do this.
- General guidelines are:
  - **Ring pessary:** checked every 6 to 9 months. Your GP will do this for you and check your vaginal skin is healthy with no ulceration or infection.
  - **Gellhorn pessary:** checked every 6 to 9 months at the hospital. You will be sent an appointment for this.
  - **Cube pessary:** you need to remove, wash and replace this type of pessary regularly — the clinic staff will explain how to do this and how often. You will have it checked every 6 to 9 months at the hospital.

It is important that you have regular checks, either at your GP or the clinic where it was fitted. To avoid complications such as ulceration, pain, infection and difficulties with removal of the pessary.

## Can I wear a pessary during sexual intercourse?

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- Some types of pessary are fine to wear during sex and some types need to be removed beforehand.
- The doctor or nurse will advise you about the type of pessary you have and what you need to do.

## What do I need to do after I have a pessary fitted?

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- Regularly apply oestrogen cream, which the doctor will prescribe.
- Have regular check-ups, approximately every 6 months.

## Who do I contact if I am worried or have a problem?

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If you have any problems with your pessary or concerns about it, please see your GP in the first instance.

## Alternative treatment options

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- Physiotherapy – supervised pelvic floor muscle exercises and lifestyle advice have been shown to improve prolapse symptoms.
- If your prolapse is not causing you any problems, you do not need to anything.
- Surgery – if you have tried other options you may wish to discuss surgery with your doctor.

## Notes

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# Canterbury

District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha

For more information about:

hospital and specialist services, go to [www.cdhb.health.nz](http://www.cdhb.health.nz) | your health and medication, go to [www.healthinfo.org.nz](http://www.healthinfo.org.nz)