

# Prolapse & Stress Incontinence

## Conservative Management

### What is pelvic organ prolapse?

This condition refers to the bulging or herniation of one or more pelvic organs into or out of the vagina. The pelvic organs consist of the uterus, vagina, bowel and bladder. Pelvic organ prolapse occurs when the muscles, ligaments and fascia (a network of supporting tissue) that hold these organs in their correct positions become weakened.

Symptoms include:

- a heavy dragging feeling in the vagina or lower back
- feeling of a lump in the vagina or outside the vagina
- urinary symptoms such as slow urinary stream, a feeling of incomplete bladder emptying, urinary frequency or urgent desire to pass urine, and urinary stress incontinence
- bowel symptoms, such as difficulty moving the bowel or a feeling of not emptying properly, or needing to press on the vaginal wall to empty the bowel
- discomfort during sexual intercourse



### Types of Prolapse

- **Cystocele**-Anterior-This is the most common type of prolapse, and involves the bladder and / or urethra bulging into the vagina.
- **Rectocele**-Posterior-This is when the lower part of the large bowel (rectum) bulges into the back wall of the vagina
- **Enterocele**-part of the small intestine bulges into the upper part of the back wall of the vagina
- **Uterine Prolapse**-this occurs when the uterus (womb) drops or herniates into the vagina. This is the second most common form of prolapse.
- **Vaginal Vault Prolapse**-following a hysterectomy, the top of the vagina may collapse downwards, (rather like the toe of a sock turning inside out) falling towards or out of the vaginal opening.
- **Urethral Hypermobility**- occurs when the urethra has excess movement with activity which contributes to stress incontinence

### Conservative Treatment Options for Prolapse

**Do nothing:** Prolapse is rarely a life-threatening condition and many women will choose not to have any treatment if they have no symptoms or discomfort. If you have been diagnosed with a prolapse, try and avoid heavy lifting, chronic straining e.g. with constipation, and gaining excess weight

**Pessary:** Pessaries are vaginal devices that come in various shapes and sizes. Pessaries help by providing mechanical support to the prolapsed organs, thus relieving symptoms. Pessaries are most suitable if you wish to delay or avoid surgery. Pessaries require fitting by your health care provider and may require some trial and error before the most suitable size and type is found for you. It is possible to remain sexually active with some types of pessaries. A properly fitted pessary is not noticeable when it is in place. Pessaries are often used for correction of stress incontinence as well.

**Pelvic floor exercises (Kegel exercises):** Exercising your weakened pelvic floor muscles may help improve or prevent the worsening of early stages of

### What causes pelvic organs to prolapse?

The main cause is damage to the nerves, ligaments and muscles which support the pelvic organs and may result from the following: ▪ Pregnancy and childbirth are considered to be major factors leading to weakening of the vagina and its supports. Prolapse affects about one in three women who have had one or more children. It is important to emphasize that only 1 out of 9 women (11%) will ever need surgery for prolapse in their lifetime ▪ Aging and menopause may cause further weakening of the pelvic floor structures ▪ Conditions that cause excessive pressure on the pelvic floor like obesity, chronic cough, chronic constipation, heavy lifting and straining ▪ Some women may have an inherited risk for prolapse, while some diseases affect the strength of connective tissue