

## Prolapse symptoms

Prolapse symptoms vary in type and severity, often depending on the type of prolapse. This health professional information article provides women with information regarding the main symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse.

### Read on now to learn:

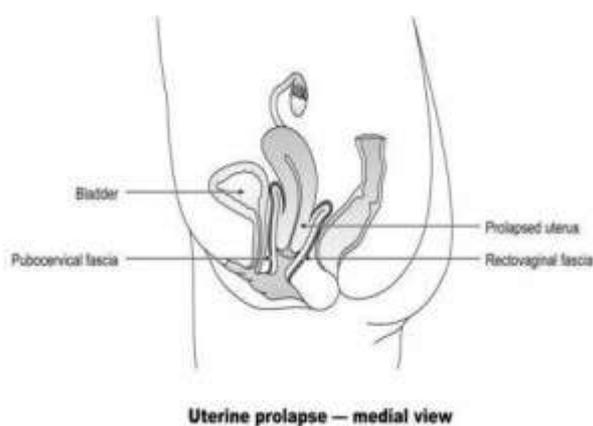
- What is a pelvic prolapse?
- Do prolapse symptoms indicate prolapse severity?
- Prolapse symptoms listed :
  - Vaginal and pelvic symptoms
  - Bladder symptoms
  - Bowel symptoms
  - Sexual dysfunction symptoms

### What is a pelvic prolapse?

A pelvic prolapse is a bulge of one or more of the pelvic organs into the vagina. The pelvic organs include the bladder, uterus, and rectum. A prolapse occurs when the walls of the vagina and the supports for the pelvic organs become weakened and stretched.

Different forms of pelvic organ prolapse are defined as follows:

- **Cystocele** is a bladder prolapse into the front wall of the vagina
- **Rectocele** is a prolapse of the large bowel (colon and/or rectum) into the back wall of the vagina
- **Uterine prolapse** is the descent of the uterus and cervix down into the vagina (illustrated below)
- **Urethrocele** is a urethral prolapse/bladder neck into the front wall of the vagina
- **Rectal prolapse** is a prolapse of the rectum through the anus.



These different types of prolapse may have unique symptoms that are particular to that specific type of prolapse for example a rectocele is typically associated with bowel symptoms.

## **Do prolapse symptoms indicate prolapse severity?**

No, prolapse symptoms do not necessarily indicate prolapse severity however there are some general trends in terms. Women with mild prolapse usually (but not always) experience minimal symptoms. Women can be completely symptom free despite their prolapse and are often surprised to learn of its existence after routine gynecological exam. Those women having a severe prolapse usually describe more noticeable symptoms.

## **Symptoms of a prolapse**

Most symptoms of a prolapse can be grouped into the following four main categories:

1. Vaginal and pelvic symptoms
2. Bladder symptoms
3. Bowel symptoms
4. Sexual symptoms

There are also other possible medical causes of these symptoms so having one or a number of these symptoms does not conclusively indicate the presence of a prolapse which needs to be medically diagnosed with physical internal examination.

The following general symptoms of pelvic prolapse can exist either in isolation or some women may find that they have a number of the following prolapse symptoms.

## **Vaginal and pelvic symptoms associated with a prolapse**

These particular symptoms often become worse with prolonged standing, over the course of the day and with straining to use the bowels.

- Bulging sensation in the vagina
- Heaviness or pressure within the vagina
- Sensation of a bulge protruding from the vaginal entrance (this may be visible sitting at the entrance of the vagina)
- Low back ache and/or pain
- Low abdominal pressure and/or pain
- Visible bulge at the entrance to the vagina
- Difficulty inserting a tampon or tampon moving down the vagina once inserted.

## **Bladder symptoms associated with a prolapse**

- Increased bladder frequency (bladder emptying)
- Bladder urgency and associated bladder leakage (strong urge to empty the bladder)
- Problems with the flow of urine which may be slow to flow, prolonged duration to empty, hesitant or stop/start urine flow
- Incomplete bladder emptying (which can contribute to chronic bladder infections and associated symptoms)
- Needing to manually reposition the vaginal prolapse to allow the bladder to empty
- Bladder flow changed according to the position of the body.

### **Bowel symptoms associated with prolapse**

- Difficulty emptying the bowel including problems commencing emptying, needing to strain throughout and a sensation of incomplete bowel emptying
- Constipation requiring straining or manual assisting using the fingers to provide pressure against or within the vagina to manually assist
- Incontinence of stool (including liquid stool and staining of underwear)
- Sensation of constantly needing to pass stool or rectal pressure
- Poor wind (flatus) control
- Bowel urgency
- Discomfort during and/or after emptying the bowel.

### **Sexual symptoms associated with prolapse**

- Vaginal pain or vaginal discomfort during or after penetrative sexual intercourse
- Difficulty with penetration with more severe prolapse
- Bladder leakage with intercourse
- Decreased sexual satisfaction
- Decreased sexual arousal
- Sexual disinterest.

"Prolapse Symptoms' for women is by Michelle Kenway, Pelvic Floor Physiotherapist. Michelle is the author and presenter of the internationally acclaimed Inside Out Pelvic Floor Safe Exercise Program for Women consisting of Inside Out - the essential women's guide to pelvic support and Inside Out pelvic floor safe workout DVD for women.

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