



Hysterectomy Support  
and Shared Experiences

# Understanding Pelvic Organ Prolapse: Types, Prevention, and Management

*A comprehensive guide to all types of pelvic organ prolapse*

## Your Prolapse Concerns Are Valid

Worries about prolapse are completely understandable, especially when you're considering or recovering from hysterectomy. The fear of your organs "falling down" or "not staying in place" can be genuinely frightening. I want you to know that prolapse is much more common than you might think, and there are many effective ways to prevent and manage it.

## The Reality About Prolapse

**Here's what might surprise you:** It is estimated that up to 40% of women will experience some degree of prolapse in their lifetime - with or without hysterectomy. This means prolapse is incredibly common and you're definitely not alone if you're dealing with it or worried about it.

**Important to understand:** There are many risk factors for prolapse, and for this reason studies are difficult because it's hard to measure like-for-like in terms of age, lifestyle, childbirth, weight, activities, etc. The biggest risk factor is actually age - the pelvic floor is a muscle and can lose strength like any other muscle as we get older.

**About hysterectomy and prolapse risk:** The risk of prolapse is only marginally increased after hysterectomy, and following recovery instructions properly reduces the risks significantly. However, a good pelvic floor health routine is essential for everyone.

## Types of Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Prolapse isn't just about the uterus - several pelvic organs can prolapse, and it's important to understand all the different types:

### Uterine Prolapse

This is when the uterus drops down into the vaginal canal. It can be caused by factors such as age, obesity, childbirth, and menopause.

### Cystocele (Bladder Prolapse)

This occurs when the bladder drops down into the front wall of the vagina. It's one of the most common types of prolapse.

### **Rectocele (Rectal Prolapse)**

This happens when the rectum pushes into the back wall of the vagina.

### **Enterocele (Small Bowel Prolapse)**

This is when part of the small intestine pushes into the upper part of the vagina.

### **Vaginal Vault Prolapse**

This can occur after hysterectomy when the top of the vagina (the vault) drops down. This is what many people worry about after hysterectomy surgery.

### **Urethrocele**

This is when the urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder) drops into the vagina.

## **Symptoms to Be Aware Of**

The symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse can vary depending on which organ is affected and how severe the prolapse is, but may include:

- **A feeling of pressure or heaviness in the pelvis or vagina**
- **A feeling that something is "falling out" or "bulging"**
- **Lower back pain or pelvic pain**
- **Difficulty inserting tampons or having comfortable sex**
- **Urinary incontinence, difficulty urinating, or frequent urination**
- **Constipation or difficulty with bowel movements**
- **Vaginal bleeding or unusual discharge**
- **Symptoms that worsen during the day or with activity**
- **Relief when lying down**

**Important:** If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to see your doctor for proper diagnosis. Many of these symptoms can have other causes, so professional evaluation is essential.

## **The Good News: Effective Management Options**

**Lots of prolapses can be effectively managed with pelvic floor therapy.** This is often the first line of treatment and can be incredibly effective for many people.

### **Non-Surgical Treatments**

**Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy:**

- Often the most effective first treatment
- Can significantly improve symptoms
- Teaches you specific exercises for your situation
- Helps with overall pelvic health

#### **Pessaries:**

- Devices inserted into the vagina to provide support
- Can be very effective for managing symptoms
- Different types available depending on your needs
- Can be used long-term safely

#### **Hormone Therapy:**

- May help strengthen vaginal tissues
- Particularly helpful around menopause
- Can improve tissue quality and support

#### **Lifestyle Modifications:**

- Weight management
- Avoiding constipation
- Proper lifting techniques
- Activity modifications

### **When Surgery Might Be Recommended**

In more severe cases, surgical treatment may be necessary. The type of surgery depends on which organs are involved and your individual situation. Sometimes prolapse is the main reason for a hysterectomy, or is repaired at the same time as a hysterectomy. Options might include:

- Surgical repair of the prolapsed organ(s)
- Hysterectomy (if the uterus is prolapsed and other treatments haven't worked)
- Procedures to support the vaginal vault
- Mesh or graft procedures for additional support

## **Essential Tips for Prevention and Management**

### **Practice Good Pelvic Floor Health**

**Pelvic floor exercises, such as Kegels, can help strengthen the muscles that support all your pelvic organs.** However, it's important to do them correctly - many people think they're doing Kegel's properly but, they aren't getting the full benefit.

*We have a comprehensive Pelvic Floor Health course included in our membership that will teach you all of the important things about caring for yours. You can find the details of our membership on our website - I'd love to support you there!*

## Maintain a Healthy Weight

Excess weight can increase pressure on your pelvic floor muscles and contribute to prolapse. Even small amounts of weight loss can make a significant difference in symptoms.

## Use Proper Body Mechanics

- **Good posture:** Poor posture can put strain on the pelvic floor muscles
- **Proper lifting technique:** Lift with your legs, not your back, and avoid holding your breath
- **Avoid heavy lifting:** Especially during recovery or if you're having symptoms

## Manage Constipation

Chronic straining during bowel movements puts significant pressure on the pelvic floor. Use stool softeners if needed and ensure adequate fiber and water intake.

## Stay Active (But Smart)

Regular exercise is important for overall health, but some high-impact activities might worsen prolapse symptoms. Low-impact activities like walking, swimming, and yoga are often better choices.

## Access to Treatment: A Common Challenge

**If you are having issues then obviously in-person treatment is best. But many don't have access to that support.** (It's one of my biggest bug bears 🙄♀️). Pelvic floor physical therapy should be more accessible to everyone, but unfortunately, it's not always available or covered by insurance.

This is why education and self-management techniques are so important. While they're not a replacement for professional treatment when needed, they can be incredibly helpful for prevention and managing mild symptoms.

## Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

### About diagnosis:

- "What type of prolapse do I have?"
- "How severe is it?"
- "What caused my prolapse?"
- "How likely is it to get worse?"

### About treatment options:

- "What are all my treatment options?"
- "Would pelvic floor therapy help me?"

- "Am I a candidate for a pessary?"
- "When would surgery be recommended?"
- "What can I do at home to help?"

#### About lifestyle:

- "What activities should I avoid?"
- "How much weight should I lift?"
- "What exercises are safe for me?"
- "How can I prevent it from getting worse?"

## Living Well with Prolapse

**The most important thing to remember:** Having prolapse doesn't mean your life is over or that you can't be active and healthy. Many people with prolapse live full, active lives with proper management.

#### Keys to success:

- Early intervention and proper treatment
- Consistent pelvic floor exercises
- Lifestyle modifications that support pelvic health
- Regular follow-up with healthcare providers
- Don't ignore symptoms - they're often manageable when addressed early

## After Hysterectomy: Special Considerations

If you've had or are planning a hysterectomy, here's what you should know:

- The risk of prolapse is only slightly increased after hysterectomy
- Following post-operative restrictions is crucial for preventing prolapse
- Your surgical technique and recovery care can impact your risk
- Pelvic floor health becomes even more important after hysterectomy
- Regular pelvic exams should include checking for prolapse

## The Bottom Line

Prolapse is common, treatable, and doesn't have to control your life. Whether you're trying to prevent prolapse or manage existing symptoms, there are effective strategies available.

**Remember:** Up to 40% of women experience some degree of prolapse in their lifetime. You're not alone, and there's no shame in having prolapse or seeking treatment for it.

The key is understanding your body, taking preventive steps when possible, and seeking appropriate care when needed. With the right approach, most people with prolapse can maintain good quality of life and stay active.

*If you're concerned about prolapse symptoms, don't wait - early intervention often leads to better outcomes. And remember, taking care of your pelvic floor health benefits everyone, whether you have prolapse or not.*

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If you would like more support, please have a browse of our hysterectomy support resources on our website. Our pelvic floor health course is included (along with other useful courses, resources and in person support from me) in our Hysterectomy Support Hub, which is all on an easy to use app. If you have any questions, please reach out to me.

You can find our website here: [🌐 Hysterectomy Support and Shared Experiences](#)



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