

Some women wish to change their own pessary and you may be shown how to do this in the clinic.

If you have a cube pessary, you will need to take it out at least twice weekly and wash it with tap water. You will be shown how to do this in the clinic.

### **Can I have sexual intercourse with a pessary in place?**

You may have sexual intercourse with a ring pessary in place. A ring pessary does not usually cause any problems with intercourse.

If you have a cube pessary, you will need to take it out for sexual intercourse.

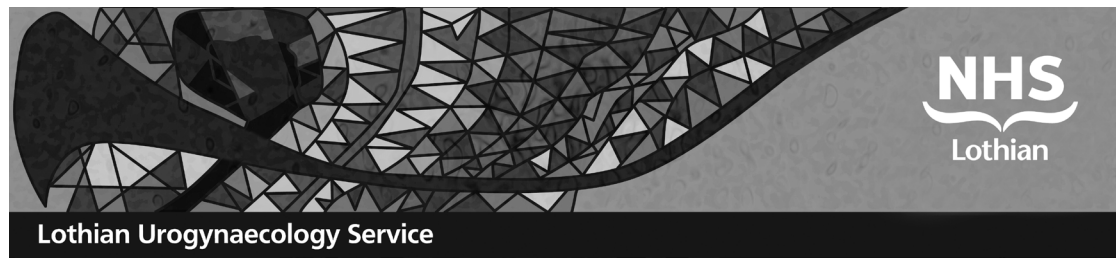
Sexual intercourse is not possible with a shelf or gelhorn pessary in place. Please talk to your nurse or doctor if you have concerns about this.

### **Are there any alternatives?**

A prolapse only needs to be treated if it is causing any symptoms. If it is not bothering you, there is no need to do anything unless you have difficulties emptying your bladder.

There is good evidence that pelvic organ prolapse symptoms improve with targeted pelvic floor muscle training, especially when this is done under the supervision of a qualified physiotherapist.

The other alternative is the surgical repair of the prolapse. Your doctor will discuss all these options with you, but ultimately it is your decision which option is most suitable for you and your symptoms.



## Vaginal Pessaries for Management of Prolapse



Ring



Cube



Shelf



Gelhorn

Lothian Urogynaecology Service

Patient information  
November 2017

Vaginal pessaries for the management of pelvic organ prolapse are effective and safe. This leaflet will hopefully answer any questions you may have about them.

## **What is a vaginal pessary?**

A vaginal pessary is a removable plastic or silicone device placed inside your vagina to support your pelvic organ prolapse. It can be fitted at the hospital clinic or at your GP surgery. There are different types and sizes of vaginal pessaries and your doctor or nurse will discuss which one is best for you.

## **When are they used?**

Vaginal pessaries are a treatment option for women with a symptomatic pelvic organ prolapse and are an alternative to surgery.

They may be used to relieve prolapse symptoms and may also be a temporary option for women awaiting surgical repair.

They are particularly suitable for women who have not yet completed their family or who are at high risk for surgery due to medical conditions.

Your doctor may also suggest fitting a pessary to 'test' the effect a surgical repair of the prolapse may have on your symptoms, especially any bladder symptoms.

## **What are the benefits of a vaginal pessary?**

It should relieve your prolapse symptoms. Prolapse symptoms are a sensation of a bulge in the vagina or outside the vagina, a dragging sensation and occasionally backache if the prolapse is large.

There is evidence that a correctly fitted pessary improves the function of your bladder and bowel and potentially also sexual function in the same way as surgery does.

It may reduce the risk of your prolapse getting any worse.

It may make it easier for you to perform your pelvic floor exercises.

It avoids surgery and the complications associated with an operation.

Vaginal pessaries are overall very safe.

## **Are there any risks?**

You may notice more vaginal discharge and irritation than normal and occasionally some slight bleeding. This may improve with more frequent changes of the pessary. If you use a pessary after the menopause, it often helps to use some oestrogen cream or pessaries in the vagina to reduce the irritation to the vaginal walls.

In the long term, there is a small risk the pessary may cause some bleeding due to rubbing on the vaginal walls. This will usually settle once the pessary is removed.

There may be further risks if a pessary is fitted and then forgotten about. If a pessary stays in place for a long time, it may create an abnormal passage into the bladder or the bowel. It is therefore very important that the pessary is changed regularly, and then this risk is minimal.

## **How is it fitted?**

The doctor in the clinic will discuss which pessary they think would be best for you. A vaginal examination will help to decide which type and size of pessary to use. Fitting the pessary is quick and usually takes only a few minutes. Some women may find the examination and fitting of the pessary uncomfortable, and you should tell the doctor or nurse if this is the case.

After your pessary is fitted, you will usually be asked you to go for a short walk and make sure you can pass urine before you leave the clinic.

If the pessary is correctly fitted, you should not be aware of it. It should not be painful or uncomfortable. If it is uncomfortable or falls out, then you may need a different size or a different type of pessary.

## **How often should my pessary be changed?**

Your pessary will usually be changed every 6 months. Depending on the type of your pessary, this may be done at your GP practice or at the hospital clinic. Many women are so satisfied with the effect of their pessary that they continue to use it for many years and potentially the rest of their life. It is important though to have your pessary changed regularly.