

Pelvic Organ Prolapse

Pelvic organ prolapse is surprisingly common post-birth – affecting about 30 to 50 percent of women and often without any symptoms.

The extra hormones during pregnancy make the abdominal connective tissue and relax to allow for childbirth. This connective tissue and the pelvic floor muscles can overstretch during birth for some women and doesn't return to its original tightness. This means the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus and rectum) being held up by this connective tissue are sitting lower than they should be.

Ask your midwife or GP to check if you have a pelvic organ prolapse before increasing your activity levels and especially before starting any high impact activity.

Signs and symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse

- Urinary incontinence – including not emptying properly or a weak stream.
- Recurring urinary tract infections (UTIs).
- Difficulty with bowel movements.
- A feeling of heaviness, dragging or pressure in your pelvic floor or vagina.
- You can feel or see a lump bulging out of the vagina.
- Not being able to use tampons.
- Pain or less sensation during sex.

Physiotherapy can help deal with pelvic prolapse

A physio can help you with:

- exercises for good bladder and bowel control. Women that have had a baby are more likely to experience incontinence.
- exercises to regain normal muscle tone and strength.
- advice on posture and back care.
- assessment and treatment of problems with joints and muscles, such as back or pelvic girdle pain and abdominal muscle separation.
- explaining how your bladder and bowel should work.

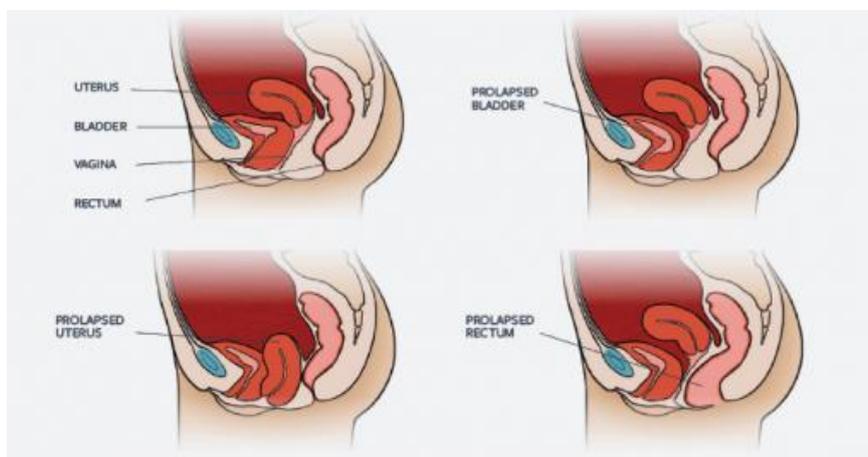


Diagram of usual pelvic organ arrangement and different types of pelvic organ prolapse.
Source: <https://www.girlsgonestrong.com/blog/articles/5-considerations-training-clients-pelvic-organ-prolapse/>

Activity advice for women with a pelvic prolapse

You can exercise safely with prolapse but take care as some forms of exercise can weaken the pelvic floor and worsen a prolapse. Prolapse can become more severe with inappropriate exercise that is not matched to the current strength of the pelvic floor.

You are likely to have weakness in your pelvic floor muscles and supportive tissues with a prolapse. This makes your pelvic floor more prone to injury since it is less resistant to pressure and strain.

Exercise places downward pressure on the pelvic floor. If the pressure is too great for the pelvic floor to withstand, the pelvic floor muscles becomes stretched, weak and floppy and less able to support your already prolapsed organs.

Select activities that strengthen your body and support your core and pelvis but don't create an environment where the pelvic organs are excessively stressed or have added pressure placed upon them.

Low impact exercises that are generally pelvic floor safe include walking, gentle cycling, water-based exercise, and low impact fitness classes such as Swiss ball classes.

Things to keep in mind if you have a prolapse:

- Limit the amount of time spent on your feet during an exercise session. Vary the body position – from standing, to seated, to side lying etc.
- Be cautious about the intensity of the load or weight in certain exercises. This is especially important for lower body exercises like squats, or overhead exercises such as overhead presses.
- Limit the amount of impact to the body during exercise. **Running and jumping are not likely to be recommended.**

Getting help and support

It is important not to ignore small problems after your first pregnancy and delivery. This is because any problems can often become worse with future pregnancies if not dealt with.

Talk to your physiotherapist or qualified exercise professional about ways you can adapt your exercise programme to make it pelvic floor safe as well as adjustments or modifications as the prolapse improves.

Check out one of the following websites for more information or support:

- [Continence NZ.](#)
- [Physiotherapy NZ.](#)
- [HealthInfo.](#)