

# **Posterior Vaginal Wall Repair without the use of mesh**

## **Patient Information Leaflet**



British Society of Urogynaecology  
Registered charity No 1143157

## About this leaflet

The information provided in this leaflet should be used as a guide. There may be some variation in how each gynaecologist performs the procedure, the care procedures on the ward immediately after your operation and the advice given to you when you get home. You should ask your gynaecologist about any concerns that you may have.

You should take your time to read this leaflet. A page is provided at the end of the leaflet for you to write down any questions you may have. It is your right to know about your planned operation/procedure, why it has been recommended, what the alternatives are and what the risks and benefits are. These should be covered in this leaflet. You may also wish to ask about your gynaecologist's personal experience and results of treating your condition.

## Benefits and risks

The success and the risks of most operations carried out to treat prolapse and incontinence have been poorly studied and so it is often not possible to define them clearly. In this leaflet risks may be referred to as common, rare etc. or an approximate level of risk may be given. Further information about risk is explained in a leaflet published by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists "Understanding how risk is discussed in healthcare".

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pi-understanding-risk.pdf>

The following table is taken from that leaflet

Risk table		
Verbal description <sup>a</sup>	Risk	Risk description <sup>b</sup>
Very common	1 in 1 to 1 in 10	A person in family
Common	1 in 10 to 1 in 100	A person in street
Uncommon	1 in 100 to 1 in 1000	A person in village
Rare	1 in 1000 to 1 in 10000	A person in small town
Very rare	Less than 1 in 10000	A person in large town

<sup>a</sup> EU-assigned frequency  
<sup>b</sup> Unit in which one adverse event would be expected

## British Society of Urogynaecology (BSUG) database

In order to better understand the success and risks of surgery for prolapse and incontinence the British Society of Urogynaecology has established a national database. All members of the society are asked to enter all procedures that they carry out onto the database and you may be asked to consent to this for your operation. The data collected are being used to develop an overall picture of what procedures are being performed throughout the United Kingdom together with complications and outcomes. Individual surgeons can also use it to evaluate their own practice.

## What is a posterior vaginal repair?

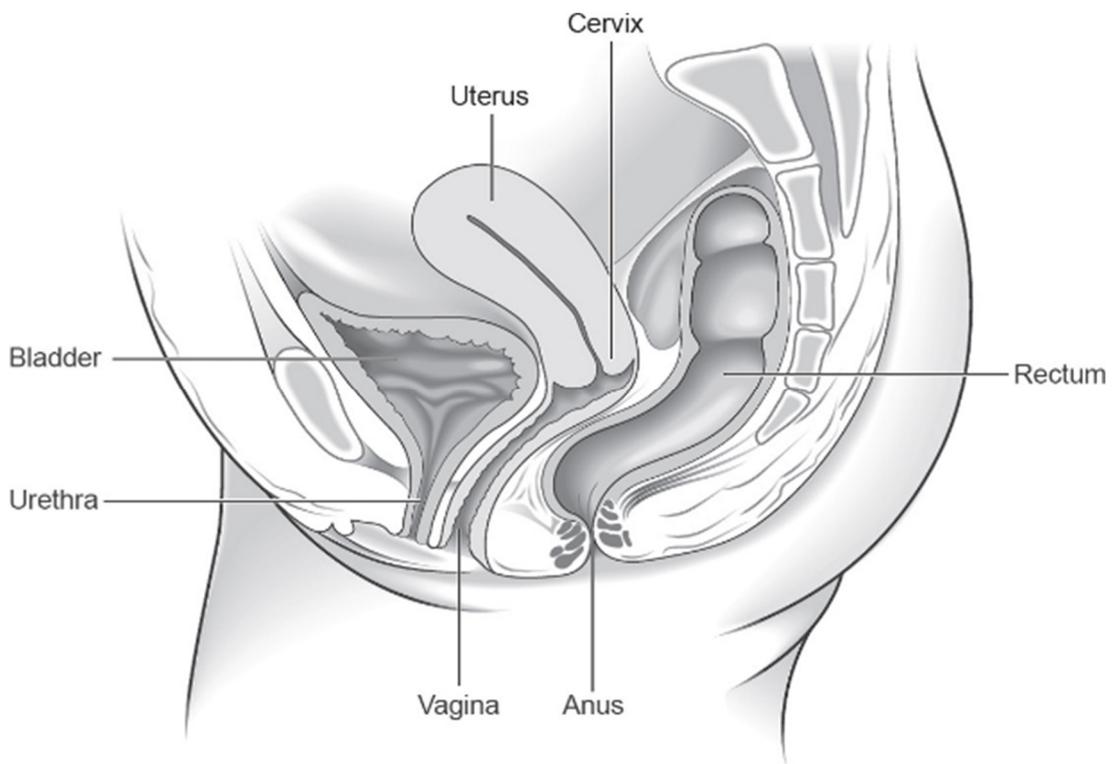
A posterior vaginal repair (colporrhaphy) is an operation performed within the vagina (front passage) to treat a posterior (back) vaginal wall prolapse also called a rectocele. It is often combined with a repair of the area between the vagina and the back passage, the perineum (perineorrhaphy).

This leaflet describes a posterior vaginal repair using your own tissues and without the use of mesh (native tissue repair).

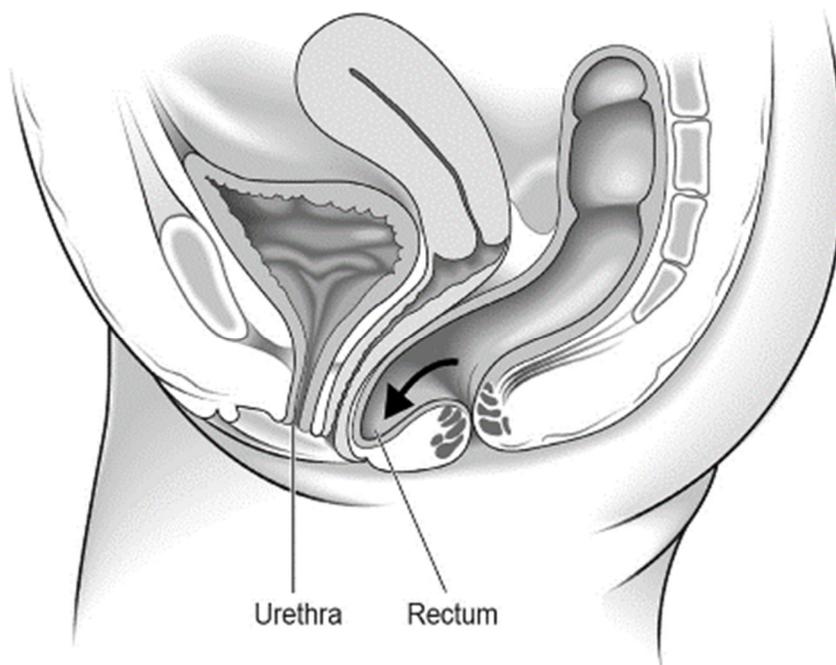
## What is a posterior vaginal wall prolapse?

- A prolapse is a bulge within the vagina caused by a weakness in the supporting tissues and muscles around the vagina so that one or more pelvic organs bulges downwards into or out of the vagina. Pelvic organs include the uterus (womb), bladder and bowel.
- Posterior means towards the back, so a posterior vaginal wall prolapse (also called a rectocele or a rectoenterocele) is a prolapse of the back wall of the vagina. The rectum (bowel) bulges through the vagina (Figure 1).
- The perineum is the area between the vagina and the back passage. It provides some support for the vagina and may be damaged during childbirth.
- The pelvic floor muscles form a hammock across the opening of the pelvis. These muscles, together with their surrounding tissue are responsible for keeping the pelvic organs (bladder, uterus, vagina, and rectum) in place and functioning correctly.
- Prolapse occurs when the pelvic floor muscles, their attachments or the vaginal tissue become weak. This usually occurs because of damage at the time of childbirth but is most noticeable after the menopause when the quality of supporting tissue deteriorates. It is also related to chronic strain caused by heavy lifting, repeated coughing and constipation.
- With straining, for example on passing a motion, the weakness described above allows the rectum (back passage) to bulge into the vagina and sometimes bulge out of the vagina (rectocele).
- A large rectocele may make it very hard to have a bowel movement especially if you have constipation.
- Some women have to push the bulge back into the vagina with their fingers, support the perineum or insert a finger in the back passage in order to complete a bowel movement.
- Some women find that the bulge causes a dragging or aching sensation.

Figure 1. Diagrams (courtesy of the RCOG) - side view of a standing woman



Normal pelvis without prolapse



Posterior vaginal wall prolapse (rectocele) with bowel bulging into the vagina due to weakness of the posterior (back) vaginal wall

## How is a posterior vaginal wall repair done?

- The operation is usually done under general anaesthetic. A general anaesthetic will mean you will be asleep during the entire procedure. A spinal anaesthetic can also be used which involves an injection in your back to numb you from the waist downwards.
- The operation is all done vaginally and involves repairing the supportive tissues using dissolvable stitches. These stitches usually take 4 to 6 weeks to dissolve although some surgeons use sutures that take about 3-6 months to dissolve completely. This should not affect your recovery time. If the perineum is repaired you might notice a few stitches on the outside but these will dissolve and fall away fairly quickly.
- A catheter and a vaginal pack (gauze tampon) may be inserted in the vagina after the operation but this is not essential and depends on the surgeon's preference and method of operating. These are usually removed the following day.

## Other operations which may be performed at the same time.

- Surgery for other types of prolapse; for example, a vaginal hysterectomy or a sacrospinous fixation or sacrohysteropexy to treat a prolapse of the uterus (womb) or the top of the vagina.
- Surgery to treat incontinence.

You should also refer to an information leaflet about any planned additional procedure.

## Benefits

The primary aim of the operation is to reduce the bulge within the vagina. There are benefits associated with this. You are likely to feel more comfortable. Intercourse may be more satisfactory. Opening your bowels may be easier, but this cannot be guaranteed.

## Risks

### General Risks of Surgery

- **Anaesthetic risk.** This is very small unless you have specific medical conditions, such as a problem with your heart, or breathing. Smoking and being overweight also increase any risks. A posterior repair can be performed with you asleep (a general anaesthetic) or awake (a spinal anaesthetic) whereby you are awake but numb from the waist down. This will be discussed with you.
  - **What can I do?** Make the anaesthetist aware of medical conditions such as problems with your heart or breathing. Bring a list of your medications. Try to stop smoking before your operation. Lose weight if you are overweight and increase your activity.

- **Bleeding.** There is a risk of bleeding with any operation. It is rare that we have to transfuse patients after their operation.
  - **What can I do?** Please let your doctor know if you are taking a blood-thinning tablet such as warfarin, aspirin, clopidogrel or rivaroxaban as you may be asked to stop them before your operation.
- **Infection.** There is a small risk of infection with any operation (about 5 to 13 cases in 100 operations). If it occurs, an infection can be a wound infection, vaginal infection or a urinary infection, and is usually treated with antibiotics. The risk of infection is reduced by routinely giving you a dose of antibiotic during your operation. Chest infection may also occur because of the anaesthetic.
  - **What can I do?** Treat any infections you are aware of before surgery. After surgery, regular deep breathing exercises can help prevent chest infections; the nurses will guide you how to do this.

- **Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT).** This is a clot in the deep veins of the leg. Occasionally this clot can travel to the lungs (pulmonary embolism) which can be very serious and in rare circumstances it can be fatal (less than 1 in 100 of those who get a clot). The risk increases with obesity, severe varicose veins, infection, immobility and other medical problems. The risk is significantly reduced by using special stockings and injections to thin the blood.
  - **What can I do?** Stop taking any hormones such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and some types of birth-control pills 4 weeks before surgery. These can usually be restarted 4 weeks following surgery when the risk of blood clots has reduced. Do not arrange surgery the day after a long car journey or flight. As soon as you are awake start moving your legs around. Keep mobile once you are at home and continue to wear your compression stockings during times when you are less mobile.
- **Wound complications.** The wound within the vagina can become infected. Occasionally stitches can become loose allowing the wound to open up or on the other hand, tighten up causing discomfort.
  - **What can I do?** Keep the surrounding area clean and dry carefully after washing using a clean towel or a hairdryer on a cool setting. Do not douche the vagina or use tampons.

### General risks of prolapse surgery

- **Getting another prolapse.** There is little published evidence of exactly how often prolapse recurs. Recurrence of the same prolapse probably occurs in about 1 in 10 cases but it is generally believed that about 3 in 10 women who have an operation for prolapse will eventually require treatment for another prolapse. This is because the vaginal tissue is weak. Sometimes even though another prolapse develops it is not bothersome enough to require further treatment.
  - **What can I do?** Keeping your weight normal for your height (normal BMI), avoiding unnecessary heavy lifting, and not straining on the toilet, may help prevent a further prolapse, although even if you are very careful it does not always prevent a further prolapse.
- **Failure to cure symptoms.** Even if the operation cures your prolapse it may fail to improve your symptoms.
- **A change in the way your bowel works.** Some patients experience worsening constipation following surgery. This may resolve with time. It is important to try to avoid being constipated following surgery to reduce prolapse recurrence.
  - **What can I do?** If you are struggling with constipation after simple changes in diet and fluid intake, your doctor/GP may prescribe some laxatives.
- **Altered sensation during intercourse:** Sometimes the sensation during intercourse may be less and occasionally orgasm may be less intense. On the other hand, repair of your prolapse may improve it.

## Specific risks of posterior vaginal wall repair

- **Damage to bowel.** This is a rare complication but requires that the damaged organ is repaired and this can result in a delay in recovery. It is sometimes not detected at the time of surgery and therefore may occasionally require a return to theatre. If the rectum (back passage) is damaged at the time of surgery, temporary colostomy (bag) may be required but this is exceptionally rare.
- **Painful sexual intercourse.** The healing usually takes about 6 weeks and after this time it is safe to have intercourse. Some women find sex is uncomfortable at first, but it gets better with time. You will need to be gentle and may wish to use lubrication initially. Occasionally pain on intercourse can be long-term or permanent.

## Before the operation - Pre-op assessment

Usually you are seen in a preoperative clinic some weeks before your planned operation. At that visit you will be seen by a nurse and possibly also a doctor. You will be asked about your general health and any medications you take. Your blood pressure will be checked and you may have tests to assess your heart and breathing. Blood tests will be taken to check you for anaemia and other things according to your medical condition. Swabs may be taken from your nose and groin to make sure that you do not carry MRSA (bacteria that are very resistant to antibiotics and may cause problems after your operation). You may be asked to sign a consent form if this has not been done already.

## After the operation - in hospital

- **Pain relief.** A posterior repair is not a particularly painful operation and often includes injection of local anaesthetic into the vaginal tissues during the operation but sometimes you may require tablets or injections for pain relief. Some women describe the pain as similar to a period. It is often best to take the pain killers supplied to you on a regular basis aiming to take a pain killer before the pain becomes a problem.
- **Drip.** You may have a drip after the operation; this is to keep you hydrated until you are drinking normally. The drip is usually removed within 24 hours..
- **Catheter.** You may have a tube (catheter) draining the bladder. The catheter may give you the sensation as though you need to pass urine but this is not the case. It is usually removed the morning after surgery or sometimes later the same day.
- **Pack.** Some gynaecologists insert a length of gauze into the vagina at the end of the operation. It acts as pressure bandage and is usually removed the following day

- **Vaginal bleeding.** There may be slight vaginal bleeding like the end of a period after the operation.
- **Eating and drinking.** You should be able to drink and eat within a few hours of returning to the ward.
- **Preventing DVT (deep vein thrombosis).** You will be encouraged to get out of bed soon after our operation and take short walks around the ward. This improves general wellbeing and reduces the risk of clots in the legs. You may be given a daily injection to keep your blood thin and reduce the risk of blood clots until you go home or longer in some cases.
- **Going home.** You are not usually in hospital for more than one or two days and may go home the same day. If you require a sick note or certificate please ask.

### After the operation – at home

- Mobilisation is very important; using your leg muscles will reduce the risk of clots in the back of the legs (DVT).
- Bath or shower as normal.
- Do not use tampons for 6 weeks and avoid douching the vagina
- Any of the stitches under the skin will melt away by themselves. The surface knots of the stitches may appear on your underwear or pads after about 2 weeks, this is quite normal. There may be little bleeding again after about 2 weeks when the surface knots fall off, this is nothing to worry about.
- You are likely to feel tired and may need to rest in the daytime from time to time for a month or more, this will gradually improve.
- It is important to avoid stretching the repair particularly in the first weeks after surgery. Therefore, avoid constipation and heavy lifting. The deep stitches dissolve during the first 3 months and the body will gradually lay down strong scar tissue over a few months.
- Avoiding constipation
  - Drink plenty of water / juice
  - Eat fruit and green vegetables especially broccoli
  - Plenty of roughage e.g. bran / oats
- Any constant cough is to be treated promptly. Please see your GP as soon as possible.
- At 6 weeks gradually build up your level of activity.

- After 3 months, you should be able to return completely to your usual level of activity.
- You should be able to return to a light job after about 6 weeks, a busy job in 12 weeks. Avoiding unnecessary heavy lifting will possibly reduce the risk of the prolapse recurring.
- You can drive as soon as you can operate the pedals and look over your shoulder without discomfort, generally after three weeks, but you must check this with your insurance company, as some of them insist that you should wait for 6 weeks.
- The healing usually takes about 6 weeks and after this time it is safe to have intercourse. Some women find sex is uncomfortable at first but it gets better with time. Sometimes the internal knots could cause your partner discomfort until they dissolve away. You will need to be gentle and may wish to use lubrication initially. Occasionally pain on intercourse can be long-term or permanent.
- You usually have a follow up appointment anything between 6 weeks and 6 months after the operation. This maybe at the hospital (doctor or nurse), with your GP or by telephone. Sometimes follow up is not required.
- See link: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/recovering-well/pelvic-floor-repair-operation.pdf>

### **What to report to your doctor after surgery**

- Heavy vaginal bleeding
- Smelly vaginal discharge
- Severe pain
- High fever
- Pain or discomfort passing urine or blood in the urine
- Difficulty opening your bowels.
- Warm, painful, swollen leg
- Chest pain or difficulty breathing

## Treatment Alternatives

### Non-surgical

- **Do nothing.** If the prolapse is not too bothersome treatment is not necessarily needed. If, however, the prolapse permanently protrudes through the opening to the vagina and is exposed to the air, it may become dried out and eventually ulcerate. Even if it is not causing symptoms in this situation it is probably best to push it back with a ring pessary (see below) or have an operation to repair it. Weight reduction in overweight women and avoiding risk factors such as smoking (leading to chronic cough), heavy weight lifting jobs and constipation may help with symptom control. The prolapse may become worse with time but it can then be treated.
- **Pelvic floor exercises (PFE).** The pelvic floor muscles support the pelvic organs. Strong muscles can help to prevent a prolapse dropping further. PFE are unlikely to provide significant improvement for a severe prolapse protruding outside the vagina. A women's health physiotherapist can explain how to perform these exercises with the correct technique. It is important that you try the above to help to manage the symptoms of your prolapse and to prevent it becoming worse. It is also very important to continue with your pelvic floor exercises even if you have opted for other treatment options.
- **Pessary.** A vaginal device, a pessary (see image below), may be placed in the vagina to support the vaginal walls and uterus. A pessary is usually used continuously and changed by a doctor or nurse every 4 to 12 months depending upon the type used and how well it suits you. Alternatively, if you prefer, you may be taught to replace the pessary yourself. It is possible to lead a normal life with continuation of activities such as bathing, cycling, swimming and, in some cases, sexual intercourse. Ongoing care is often at the GP practice but some women will need to be kept under review in the Gynaecology clinic. Pessaries are very safe and many women to choose to use one long term rather than have an operation. On occasions their use has to be discontinued due to bleeding, discharge, sexual difficulties or change in bladder function but these all stop quickly after removal. Sometimes it will take several visits to the clinic to determine the best size for you. A pessary is not suitable for all women.



## Surgical

The following table lists the different operations that can be considered to treat prolapse of the posterior vaginal wall (rectocele/rectoenterocele). Further information on the operations is available in separate leaflets. All operations are not available in all hospitals. Your consultant may recommend a particular operation depending on his or her preference and expertise, or your individual needs.

Treatment	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Posterior vaginal repair</b> (described in this leaflet)	Relatively minor operation Can be done with you awake or asleep	Recurrence rate of up to 30%
<b>Colpocleisis</b> (closing of vagina)	High success rates (90-95%) Can be done with you awake or asleep	Sexual intercourse will never be possible after this operation. Urinary incontinence in the future may be more difficult to treat If you have not already had a hysterectomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not possible to take a smear</li> <li>• Difficult to investigate inside the uterus if abnormal bleeding occurs</li> </ul>
<b>Synthetic Mesh insertion</b> vaginally	May provide better support for repeat surgery Can be done with you awake or asleep	Significant risk of complications: mesh - exposure/ extrusion, discomfort with intercourse, other pain, infection
<b>Biological graft insertion</b> vaginally	No cuts in abdomen (tummy) May possibly provide better support compared to standard repair with stitches Can be performed as a day case.	Risks vary depending on which graft is used. Some grafts can result in fluid collections which may need draining. Risk of healing problems and graft exposure in the vagina with some grafts.  As most biological grafts dissolve in 6 months any graft related problems will often resolve after 6 months.

## More information

If you would like to know more about uterine prolapse and the treatments available for it, you may try the following sources of information.

- Ask your GP.
- Ask the Doctor or Nurse at the hospital.
- Look at a website such as
  - NHS choices at <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>
  - Patient UK at <http://patient.info/health>
  - Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Recovering Well leaflet at  
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/recovering-well/pelvic-floor-repair-operation.pdf>
  - Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists patient information leaflet – Pelvic organ prolapse at  
<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/gynaecology/pi-pelvic-organ-prolapse.pdf>
  - International Urogynaecology Association (IUGA) patient information leaflet – Posterior vaginal repair and perineal body repair at  
[http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iuga.org/resource/resmgr/Brochures/eng\\_postvwrepair.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iuga.org/resource/resmgr/Brochures/eng_postvwrepair.pdf)
  - Patient information leaflets for you own hospital and others (usually available on line)

## Acknowledgements

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## Making a decision - things I need to know before I have my operation.

**Shared Decision Making**

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.

**Ask 3 Questions**

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

\* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd H., et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011, 94: 379-85

**AQUA** **NHS** <http://www.advancingqualityalliance.nhs.uk/SDM/>

**Please list below any questions you may have, having read this leaflet.**

1).....

2).....

3).....

**Please describe what your expectations are from surgery.**

1).....

2).....

3).....