

## Information for Women about Urinary Incontinence and Vaginal Prolapse

### WHAT IS VAGINAL PROLAPSE?

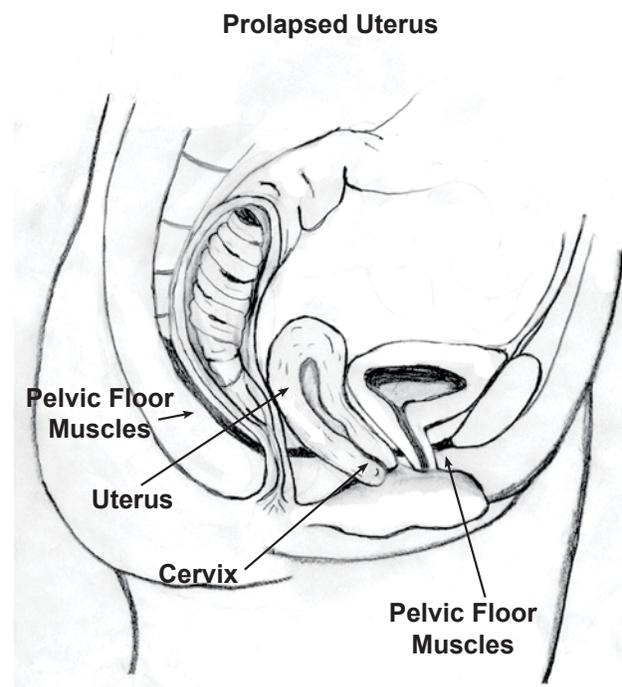
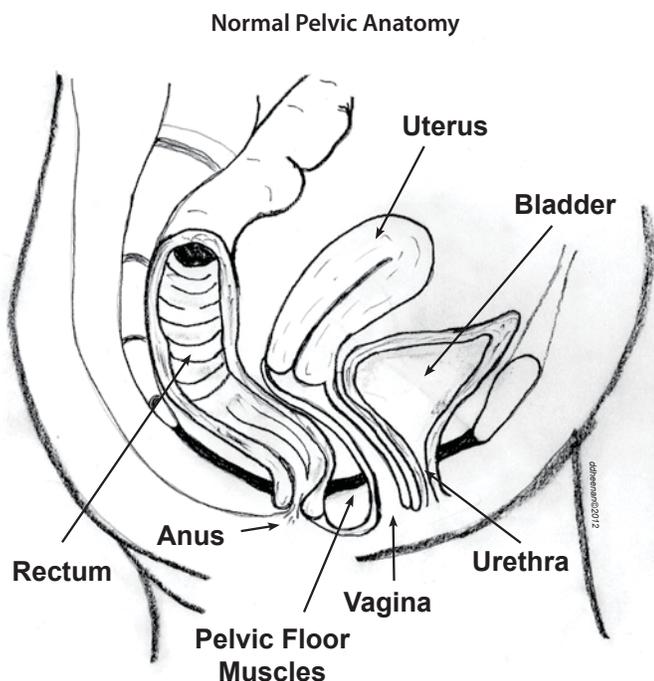
A **vaginal prolapse** can happen when the tissue and muscles inside the pelvis become weak. This weakness allows the vagina, uterus, bowel or bladder to come down. Imagine a sock turning itself inside out.

The main symptom of vaginal prolapse is a bulge between the legs that you can see or feel. It may go in and out of the vagina depending on whether you are standing, sitting or lying down. It feels bigger with activities that put pressure on the area such as lifting, coughing, straining with bowel movements, and in the evening after being upright all day. Prolapse may stay the same size for long periods

or it may get bigger over time. For a few, the bulge becomes smaller and less noticeable.

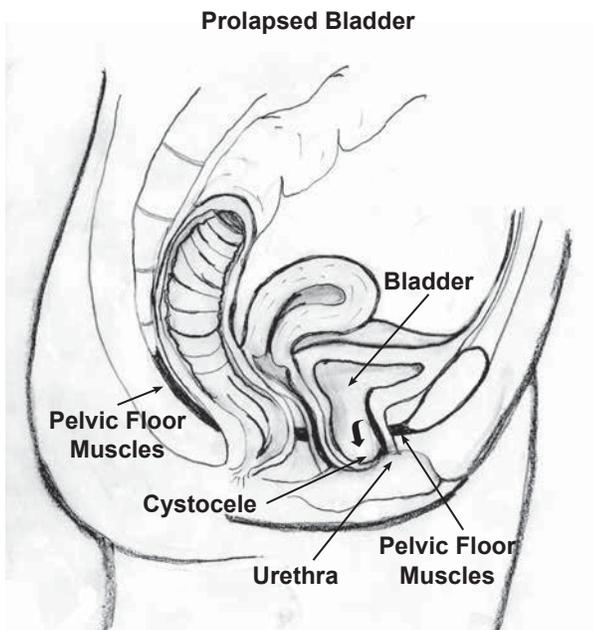
Prolapse happens because of weakness, damage or stretching of the support structures at the bottom of the pelvis that hold your organs in. These muscles are called the "pelvic floor." Although it can occur in any woman, prolapse is often caused by having babies, increasing age and obesity. Other factors that may stretch or weaken pelvic tissues include constipation, chronic cough or long-term heavy lifting.

Prolapse does not usually cause pain or constipation, but it can be uncomfortable and may affect the bladder, bowel and sexual function.

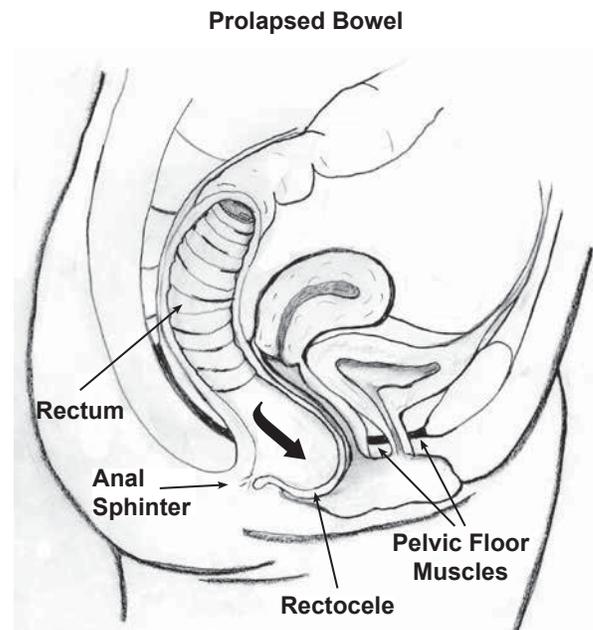


Illustrations courtesy Medical Media Services, Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region.

**Prolapsed bladder (cystocele):** When the bladder collapses into the vagina, it can make it harder to empty the bladder completely when you urinate. Incomplete bladder emptying can cause bladder infections. Some women with bladder prolapse also have urinary incontinence.



**Prolapsed bowel (rectocele):** When the bowel collapses into the vagina from behind, stool can go in the wrong direction with straining. This can cause incomplete emptying of the bowel. Some women may need to push on the prolapse with their fingers in the vagina to help empty the bowel. Changing the stool consistency, aiming for soft, formed stool and avoiding constipation, plus learning correct evacuation postures and techniques can help relieve some of these symptoms.



**Sexual function:** When prolapse is present, it is the walls of the vagina that collapse inward and create a bulge between the legs. Some women find that the prolapse gets in the way of sexual intercourse. The woman or her partner may worry about hurting the woman or making the prolapse worse, but this is not

the case. Intercourse is safe, even when prolapse is present. If intercourse is painful, it may be related to other factors, such as vaginal dryness related to menopause.