

## Information for Women

# Pessary

A pessary is a silicone disc or ring that is specially fit for you by a doctor or nurse. The pessary is inserted into the vagina (like a tampon) where it helps to support the pelvic organs and stop them from coming down (**vaginal prolapse**).

A pessary can also be used to treat **stress incontinence**, because it puts gentle pressure on the urethra (tube that drains the bladder) to help it stay closed. About two-thirds of women find that a pessary helps.

Some women try a pessary while they wait for stress incontinence or prolapse surgery, and others use a pessary to avoid surgery.

Most women can wear a pessary safely for several days at a time. Pessaries can be left in for most activities of daily life, but should be removed for sexual activity.

### Using a pessary

You will be fitted with a pessary that is the right size and shape. It might take a few tries to find a pessary that will provide support without causing discomfort or slipping out. You will be taught to insert and remove the pessary on your own. A string can be attached to the pessary to assist with removal.

Your doctor might prescribe low dose estrogen cream to use for keeping your vaginal tissue healthy.

You will be instructed to remove your pessary once or twice weekly. For example, remove it overnight on Monday and Thursday every week. If you are menopausal and do not use estrogen, removal of your pessary is recommended every night.

On the evenings when the pessary is removed, you may use your estrogen and prepare the pessary for insertion the following morning.

### Pessary care

The pessary is washed with mild soap (avoiding perfumes) and rinsed well. After drying, a new string may be attached, so the pessary is ready to be re-inserted the following morning. Boiling or sterilizing the pessary is not necessary.

Over time, pessaries may become discoloured. They only require replacement if cracks develop on the surface.

You will be asked to return for a follow up check after using a pessary for 2-4 weeks.



It might take a few tries to find a pessary that provides supports without causing discomfort. (Photo courtesy Superior Medical Limited.)

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## Is there a risk to using a pessary?

A pessary is very safe when users follow the instructions for care and management. The main risk of using a pessary is the development of an infection or erosion (ulcer) in the vagina which can result in bleeding or a foul smelling discharge. You should see your doctor if you develop these symptoms. A rest from using the pessary may be necessary.

Because emergencies may occur where a woman is not able to speak for herself, she should let someone close to her know about her pessary use so it can be removed.

