

Pessary Owner's Manual

A pessary is a device that is placed into the vagina to support the bladder, rectum or uterus. While there are many types and shapes, the most commonly used pessary is a firm ring that presses against the wall of the vagina and urethra to help decrease leakage and support a prolapsed vagina. The type and size of the pessary should be fitted to meet the needs of your problem and the requirements of your anatomy. A properly fitted pessary is not noticeable when it is in place. You may have bruising of the vulvar and lower abdominal area and a small amount of vaginal bleeding with initial placement and with any maintenance. The bruising will resolve with time.

You may have sensations of pressure or rubbing with continued wear of the pessary. It is not unusual to have to change the shape or size of the pessary after the initial fitting or even after continued wear. You may be aware of an increase in vaginal discharge or secretions with pessary use. However, the pessary is made of silicone, and does not absorb odors or secretions so the same pessary can be used for many years. We recommend external cleansing on a regular basis when you are bathing or showering. Do not douche or use vaginal products unless specifically provided by your health care provider.

Caring for a pessary is a skill easily learned. Pessaries can be left in place for extended periods of time, but when pessaries are removed for periodic easy cleansing, there tends to be a lower incidence of vaginal infections. Some women choose to remove the pessary nightly before bed and replace it in the morning. It can be left in during intercourse if this is comfortable for you. If you are unable to remove your pessary or feel uncomfortable doing so, you will see your physician at least every three months for maintenance.

Inserting Your Pessary

Wash your hands. The notches inside the open ring and the openings in the ring-with-support are the flexible points. The gelhorn bends where the knob meets the disc. Grasp the device midway between these points and fold the pessary in half. The curved part should be facing the ceiling (like a taco). Put a small amount of water soluble lubricant (KY Jelly, Slippery Stuff or other brand) on the insertion edge. Hold the folded pessary in one hand and spread the lips of your vagina with the other hand. Gently push the pessary as far back into the vagina as it will go. You can do this squatting, standing with one foot propped on the tub or toilet, or sitting with your feet propped up. The vagina is like a blind-ending cave: there is no way to lose the pessary into your abdomen or for it to migrate too far up. The higher it is, the more comfortable you will be.

Removing Your Pessary

Wash your hands. Find the rim of the pessary just under the pubic bone at the front of your vagina. Locate the notch or opening and hook your finger under or over the rim. Tilt the pessary slightly, about a 30° angle, and gently pull down and out of the vagina. If you can fold the pessary somewhat, it will ease the removal. Bearing down as if you are having a bowel movement can help push the rim of the pessary forward so you can grasp it more easily.

Cleaning Your Pessary

You can clean your pessary with soap and water. Do not use any alcohol-based products as this can cause residue that will burn when you reinsert the pessary.

Possible Complications from Using a Pessary

Pain or discomfort means the pessary is not fitting correctly and should be replaced with a different size. A pink or bloody discharge could mean the pessary is chafing against the wall of the vagina. In most cases, removal will allow the area to heal. In cases of bleeding, a visit to the doctor is needed. White-colored discharge from the vagina is common. However, if the discharge becomes colored or smells badly, it could mean a vaginal infection or ulceration. Using an estrogen cream or having vaginal laser treatments can improve the health of the vaginal skin, which gets thinner with age.