



# WHAT IS Pelvic Organ Prolapse (POP)?

The pelvic organs (bladder, uterus, vagina, small intestine, rectum) are supported by the pelvic floor muscles, and other structures such as tendons and ligaments. A weakening in the support system may result in one or more of the pelvic organs “dropping” or “sagging down” from the normal position. Although POP is more common among older women, it can happen to women of any age.

## CAUSES

Common causes of POP include:

- vaginal childbirth
- aging
- excess weight
- lack of estrogen (due to menopause or hysterectomy)
- injury to the pelvic floor muscle or other supporting structures
- chronic straining, such as with constipation

## SYMPTOMS

Common symptoms include:

- a feeling of fullness in the pelvic region
- low back pain
- urinary/fecal incontinence
- inability to fully empty the bowel or bladder
- pain with intercourse

Your symptoms may feel worse after you have been upright for a while. This is because gravity is pulling down on the organs and adding strain to the area. For the same reason, you might feel better when you lie down.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE POP?

Your pelvic floor physical therapist will be able to tell if you have POP by watching your organ(s) while you “bear down.” The therapist can get a sense of how severe the problem is. Further testing may also be conducted, and may include an MRI of the pelvic floor, the rectum or the muscles around the rectum (sphincter), if needed.

## TREATMENT

Often, the pain and pressure from POP can be reduced without surgery. Treatment options depend on the severity of the problem, which organs are affected, your age and sexual activity. Treatments may include:

- pelvic floor strengthening exercises
- making changes to avoid strain to the area; for example, learning to avoid constipation
- use of a pessary (a supportive device inserted into the vagina, similar to a contraceptive diaphragm), which acts as a sling to hold up and support the prolapsed organ

There are also operations to correct POP, if necessary. You and your pelvic floor physical therapist will work together on a treatment plan that is right for you. Please call us at **617-754-9100**, if you have any questions.