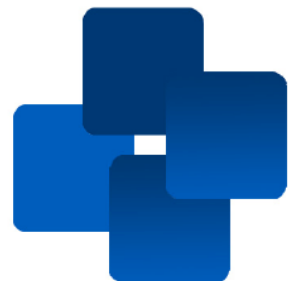


Patient Information

Incontinence and Prolapse

Self-help

Urogynaecology



Introduction

This leaflet is produced as a self-help guide for women of East and North Herts that are experiencing issues with continence.

What is continence?

Continence means you have control over your bladder. You can hold urine and let it out when you choose. When your pelvic floor becomes weak you may experience incontinence.

What is incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is the unintentional passing of urine. It is a common problem and is thought to affect millions of people worldwide. It's not clear exactly how many people are affected, but it's estimated that between three and six million people in the UK may have some degree of urinary incontinence.

Urinary incontinence affects both men and women, but it tends to be more common in women overall.

Types of urinary incontinence are:

- **Stress incontinence** - Coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting and jumping all put a pressure on the bladder and if the pelvic floor muscles are not strong enough you will leak urine.
- **Urge incontinence** - An urgent desire to pass urine and sometimes urine leaks before reaching the toilet. It is usually due to an 'overactive bladder'.
- **Overflow incontinence** - Inability to urinate well even when urge is felt. Bladder never feels empty. Frequently going to the toilet at night. Urine dribbles occur even after you have emptied your bladder.

What is pelvic organ prolapse?

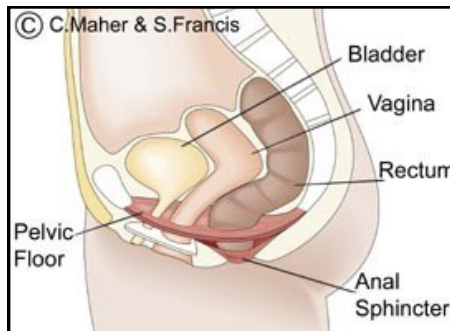
Pelvic organ prolapse is bulging of one or more of the pelvic organs into or out of the vagina. The pelvic organs consist of the uterus, vagina, bowel and bladder. Pelvic organ prolapse occurs when the muscles, ligaments and fascia (a network of supporting tissue) that hold these organs in their correct positions become weakened.

Symptoms may include:

- A sensation of a bulge or something coming down or out of the vagina, which sometimes needs to be pushed back.
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse.
- Problems passing urine such as slow stream, a feeling of not emptying the bladder fully, needing to urinate more often and leaking a small amount of urine when you cough, sneeze or exercise.

Pelvic Floor Muscles

The pelvic floor muscles are located between your legs and run from your pubic bone at the front, to the base of your spine at the back. They are shaped like a sling and hold your pelvic organs (uterus, vagina, bowel and bladder) in place.



The pelvic floor muscles support the bladder and bowel, and give you control when you urinate. They relax at the same time as the bladder contracts (tightens) to let urine out. You can strengthen these muscles by doing regular pelvic floor exercises.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

- ◆ Try to **imagine** the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine (**don't** actually practice this). These muscles lie around the anus, vagina and urethra.
- ◆ Imagine you are in company and have the sudden urge to pass wind tighten up the muscles around the anus.
- ◆ At the same time, draw in your vagina as if you're gripping a tampon, and your urethra as if to stop the flow of urine (you should not be tightening your buttock or thigh muscles).
- ◆ At first, do this exercise quickly, tightening and releasing the muscles immediately.
- ◆ Then do it slowly, holding the contractions for as long as you can before you relax - try to count to 10.
- ◆ Try to do eight squeezes at least three times every day - to help you remember, you could do a set at each meal.

You could also try these exercises

- **Visualise pulling your 'sitting bones' together**
- **Visualise pulling your tailbone towards your pubic bone**

For each one aim for:

- 10 fast on/off contractions
- Then up to 10 slower contractions, holding each one for 10 seconds.
- Try to do these five times per day.

Food and Drink

The following are good for your bladder:



Water



Milk



Milk Shakes



Herbal Tea
For example:
Camomile and
Peppermint



Non-Citrus Squash
or
Diluted Juice

Food and Drink

The following are not suitable as they irritate the bladder and should be avoided:



**All tea and coffee,
including decaffeinated**



Tomatoes



**Fruit Juices -
especially citrus**



Green Tea



Hot Chocolate



Blackcurrant



Alcohol



Fizzy Drinks

Additional Information



If you are a smoker, you will be offered referral to the Hertfordshire Stop Smoking Service in order that you are aware of the risks associated with smoking and surgery.

It is not mandatory to stop smoking prior to surgery but the Trust ensures that patients are in a position to make an informed choice about the risks.

East and North Herts Trust operates a strict no smoking policy on its premises.



Raised BMI is a major contributory factor to premature death and ill health in Hertfordshire.

The Trust aims to inform patients of the benefits of losing weight and support them in doing so.

Patients who successfully lose weight will benefit from fewer complications and achieve wider health benefits.

Contact details

If you have any questions or require further information please contact the **Urogynaecology Department** (based at Chells Surgery, Stevenage) on **07880 053804**

Please use this space to write down any questions you may wish to ask

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