



# WOMEN'S HEALTH

## A Common Women's Health Condition That Most Don't Know About

(NAPSA)—Listen up ladies: Too many women are needlessly suffering with a common health condition called pelvic organ prolapse (POP).

Why? For a number of reasons—some wait to see if it gets better, others are too embarrassed to talk about it. POP, or the shifting of pelvic organs, affects as many as 50 percent of all women who have given birth vaginally.

In fact, new survey results show that four out of five women over the age of 21 have never heard about POP, and nearly half (47 percent) waited one to two years before discussing their symptoms with their doctors.

“For eight years I had increasing pelvic pressure, sharp pains with heavy lifting, low-back pain, urinary frequency and urgency, and discomfort during sexual intercourse, but I was embarrassed to discuss such intimate issues with my doctor,” said Nina, a POP patient. “Looking back, I can’t believe how foolish I was to suffer in silence for so long.”

So what *is* happening down there? The organs in the pelvic cavity—the uterus, vagina, bladder and rectum—are held in place by a web of muscles and connective tissues that act like a hammock.

When these muscles and tissues become weakened or damaged, which can happen as a consequence of vaginal childbirth, one or more of the pelvic organs shift out of their normal position and literally “fall” into, or even out of, the vagina.

### Got Stretch Marks?

A study in *The Journal of Investigative Dermatology* reported that stretch marks from pregnancy may indicate you are more prone to pelvic organ prolapse because you have weaker connective tissue.



As a result, the organs may press against the vaginal walls producing a hernia-like bulge, causing discomfort, affecting sexual activity and limiting physical activity.

Although it’s so common, two out of three women in the survey who were diagnosed with the condition were not aware of it before experiencing symptoms.

Why? Unfortunately, there’s a communication gap between doctors and patients—81 percent of surveyed women who have given birth did not receive education about the relationship between vaginal delivery and possible POP from their OB/GYN.

Results also showed that of the women who were aware of POP, 86 percent learned about it from sources other than their doctor, such as friends, relatives or co-workers.

So, if you think you have POP, what do you do?

Say something to your doctor!

Trust your instinct—if something feels wrong, ask about it. The good news is a variety of treatment options are available. However, because there are different types and stages of pro-

lapse, defined by where the weakness occurs and which organ is affected, treatment options can vary from Kegel exercises to surgery.

### Do You Have Pelvic Organ Prolapse?

- Have you felt a pressure in your pelvic area or lower back that won’t go away?
- Do you experience pain or discomfort with intercourse?
- Does it constantly feel like you are wearing a tampon and it is falling out?
- Have you noticed some leakage or loss of bladder?
- Do you have chronic constipation or other bowel problems?
- Is there a bulge or lump in your vagina?
- Do you have difficulty emptying your bladder control?

If you said yes to even a few of these, talk to your doctor about symptoms and treatment options.



Talk to your doctor if you are experiencing any of the symptoms listed in the box above and together you can determine the treatment option that’s best for you.

This survey was conducted among 508 females ages 21 and older, living in the continental United States.

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