

# Information about HFHT Pessary Fittings: Preparing for your Upcoming Visit

This information package is for Hamilton Family Health Team (HFHT) patients who have been referred to HFHT Physiotherapy Services for a Pessary Fitting. If you have questions regarding a scheduled appointment with HFHT Physiotherapy for Pessary Care, please contact our HFHT front reception by calling us at 905-667-4848. If you do not have a scheduled appointment and believe this option may be right for you, please contact your family doctor.

## Pessary Fittings Benefits, Risks, and Alternatives



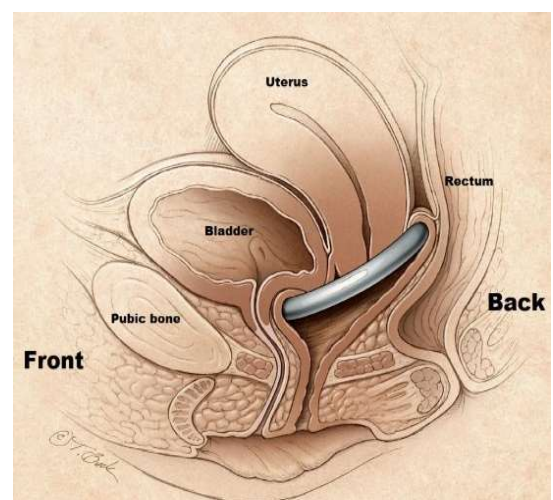
You have been recommended a pessary to internal support for your pelvic organ prolapse and/or stress urinary incontinence symptoms. Common pessaries in the pictures above are ring, ring with knob, cube and Gellhorn pessaries, but there are other pessary options as well.

### What do pessaries do?

Pessaries support the front vaginal wall (prolapse here is called cystocele) and uterus (or vaginal vault if you've had a hysterectomy). Cube pessaries also support the back vaginal wall (prolapse here is called rectocele). Pessaries comfortably support pelvic organ prolapse in 66-75% of people who try to use one.

Pessaries also support the bladder neck and can help with stress urinary incontinence. Pessaries comfortably help with stress incontinence in 33-50% of people who try to use one.

Pessaries do not fix/repair pelvic organ prolapse or stress incontinence. Just like wearing a bra doesn't give you a permanent breast lift, a pessary is a device that holds the tissues in place, but for most people they only provide relief when the pessary is in place.



## Potential Benefits

A pessary that works well will immediately resolve your heaviness and/or bladder leaking symptoms. You should be unable to feel the pessary at all or you might feel a minimal supportive sensation. A pessary should not hurt once inserted. For most pessaries, you can insert and remove the pessary yourself, giving you the freedom to choose when you use it. Using a pessary to resolve your symptoms could help you avoid needing surgery.

## Potential Risks or Side Effects (most common denoted with \*):

- Increased vaginal secretions (moderate amounts may collect on the pessary)\*
- Irritation/fissure at the introitus\*
- Small amount of blood on pessary\*
- Expulsion of the pessary with bearing down (heavy lifting or straining for a bowel movement)\*
- Discomfort during trial or routine removal/insertion\*
- Irritation or ulcers with or without bleeding of vaginal tissues
- Stress urinary incontinence\*
- Difficulty/pain evacuating bowels or emptying bladder\*
- Vaginal or urinary tract infection

The following events are rare and typically associated with improper care and infrequent removal of the pessary, so it is important to follow your pessary follow up appointments and routine pessary self-management: Incarceration or migration of the pessary (pessary moving into vaginal wall or other neighbouring tissues). One small study showed increased risk of squamous cell vaginal cancer, and there are case reports of fistula.

As a preventative measure, it is suggested you inform your loved ones that you may be wearing a pessary to allow adequate medical management in the event that you are unable to share this information with your health team due to injury or illness.

## Alternatives:

If you choose not to use a pessary or cannot find one that fits comfortably, these are the other options that you have:

- Do nothing - this may mean wearing liners for bladder leaking or using vaginal creams for exposed vaginal wall tissue at the vagina to prevent chafing; some people find their prolapse symptoms or stage decrease naturally over time; stress incontinence is not medically dangerous, and pelvic organ prolapse is dangerous only if there is tissue chaffing or urine/bowel retention, however having bothersome bladder leaking or vaginal sensations can greatly impact your quality of life and confidence.
- Pelvic floor muscle exercises - these help for stress urinary incontinence 50-75% of the time, and can help with pelvic organ prolapse symptoms if prolapse is mild

- Hypopressive exercises - less success than pelvic floor muscle training alone for prolapse
- Other internal vaginal support devices for incontinence - Contiform, Incostress, Urestra are vaginal devices that you can purchase online / over the counter and use at your discretion.
- Medical options - bladder neck bulking injections or pelvic surgeries for stress incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse. More information about medical options can be found here: <https://www.yourpelvicfloor.org/leaflets/>

## What to Expect – Pessary Fitting Appointment and Follow-ups

### First Appointment (Pessary Fitting) – Come with bladder partially full

The first appointment will take about 90 minutes. During your first appointment, your physiotherapist will ask you about your symptoms, treatment goals, and any concerns you may have regarding the pessary. After this discussion, you'll move through the exam and fitting process, which includes:

- **Pelvic examination:** Your physiotherapist will assess your pelvic floor strength and your pelvic floor shape/condition to determine the right size and type of pessary. Your physiotherapist will do a general check of the inner and outer tissues of the vagina using a speculum. This is a general tissue health screen – physiotherapists cannot diagnose any tissue abnormalities. If there are any concerns, the physiotherapist will collaborate with you and your doctor, and pessary use may be delayed until appropriate treatment is received. Common treatment may be using a topical estrogen cream and/or vaginal moisturizer in the area to ensure your tissues can tolerate the pessary, either before a pessary can be used or while a pessary is used.
- **Fitting:** if there are no abnormal tissue signs (e.g. irritation, bleeding), then your physiotherapist will begin the fitting process. It is a process of trial and error. We will start with the smaller sizes and increase size as needed. It is normal to have some mild, temporary discomfort with inserting/removing pessaries. We will be communicating throughout the appointment so that you feel comfortable moving forward. We can stop the appointment at any time if needed. When a pessary fits well you should not feel it once inserted.
- **Comfort assessment:** After the fitting, the physiotherapist will do a comfort assessment. You will be asked to stand up, move around, use the washroom and push down to ensure the pessary fits well. You may also be asked to try any other movements that are typically bothersome - lifting, squatting, running etc.
- **Self-care:** Once you have a pessary that fits well, your physiotherapist will teach you how to remove, clean, and insert the pessary yourself for home use if applicable to the type of pessary you have and your preferences. Some people choose “clinic-managed” care (vs self-managed care), in which case you would be expected to return to the clinic every 3 months for removal and cleaning of your pessary.

Be ready to try up to three different types and sizes of pessaries during this 90 minute appointment, as people often have to try a couple of different pessaries to find one that fits. If we do not find one that



works in this first appointment, you may come back for another appointment at a later date to try other sizes/types.

## Follow-up Appointments

At the booking of your first appointment, you should have also been booked for your first follow-up 1-2 weeks after your first appointment. This is to ensure your pessary is working well for you and to check for vaginal tissue irritation. This appointment is 45 minutes, unless a refitting is needed. Please contact HFHT front reception at 905-667-4848 if you do not have this appointment booked already.

If you are choosing **self-managed care** (i.e. managing the cleaning/removal/insertion of the pessary on your own at home):

- Your next follow-ups at HFHT Physiotherapy will be scheduled after 3 months, and then after 6 months. Any additional follow-ups can be scheduled with HFHT Physiotherapy as needed, e.g. if your pessary needs change

If you are choosing **clinic-based care** (i.e. cleaning/removal/insertion of pessary will be done at HFHT Physiotherapy):

- Your next follow-ups at HFHT Physiotherapy will be scheduled for every 3 months

**If you cannot keep these above appointments, it is not recommended that you use a pessary. Never leave a pessary inside uncleaned for more than three months.**

**Whether you are choosing self-managed care or clinic-based care, it is recommended that you see your primary care provider (GP/NP/PA) every 12 months for a vaginal tissue health check when using a pessary. This is to check that the pessary has not caused any scratches, sores, or irritations.**

## Cost

The cost for a pessary through HFHT is \$152.92, which is due at the end of your first pessary fitting appointment. This fee covers the cost of the pessary you take home with you as well as the sizing options you may have tried during the appointment.

There is a chance that the pessary you purchase does not end up fitting correctly once you do all your desired activities at home, or that you find you need a bigger or smaller size pessary over the course of time as the vaginal structures change, or if you need different support with different activities. This tends to happen within the first 1-6 months of using a pessary. Therefore, you may end up purchasing more than one pessary over time. Because of the intimate nature of the device, we are unable to return/refund a pessary after purchase, even if it doesn't work for you over time. We do our best to avoid this by being as thorough as we can be in the pessary fitting appointment by trying different movements and activities in as many ways as possible during the time available.

## Getting Ready for your Appointment

### What to bring to your appointment

- A partially full bladder (to be able to test emptying of your bladder with the pessary)
- Your own incontinence products (if applicable)
- A support person, if you would like someone to be with you during the fitting process
- If you have difficulty with English, you may bring someone with you to help with translation during the appointment. We also have translation and interpretation services available if needed. Please call HFHT front desk reception at 905-667-4848 so we can assist in coordinating these services for your appointment.

### When to reschedule your appointment

Call HFHT front desk reception at 905-667-4848 to reschedule your appointment if you:

- Have any flu/cold-like symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, chills, vomiting)
- Have a bladder, urinary tract, or vaginal infection
- Are menstruating. The menstrual fluid will prevent adequate screening of vaginal tissue health

## After your Fitting

Instructions will be provided after your fitting on how to take care of your pessary. It is important to follow these instructions as pessaries may cause vaginal irritation if they are not routinely maintained and cleaned. Never leave a pessary inside uncleaned for more than three months.

### Signs you should remove your pessary and contact your Pessary Fitter and Doctor:

- Pain, discomfort or difficulty at rest, during activity or urinating and defecating (poor fit)
- Unusual secretions (ie yellow/green) or bleeding (infection or irritation)
- Pessary falls out or feels like it does not fit correctly (poor fit)
- Itching, fever, swelling (infection or irritation)

**Remember, you are responsible for using your pessary as advised including following care procedures, adhering to follow up appointments, monitoring for adverse effects and contacting your Physiotherapist and Family doctor if you have questions or concerns.**