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The Lowdown on Prolapse

The pelvic organs, including the uterus, bladder, rectum, and vagina, are suspended within the pelvis by connective tissue, supported underneath by the pelvic floor muscles. Various factors, including pregnancy and childbirth, can place significant stress on these tissues, disrupting the amount of support they normally provide. With less support, the pelvic organs are at risk of dropping lower into the pelvic cavity, which is known as prolapse. A recent systematic review highlighted vaginal birth, number of births, age, and BMI as significant risk factors for POP.¹

How do I know if I have it? POP is usually diagnosed by inserting an instrument to measure how far the organs descend during a maximal pushing attempt while you are laying on your back. Severity is graded according to how far the organs descend.

How common is prolapse? About 40% of women 45-85 years old demonstrate signs of POP, while only 12% of them report symptoms.¹ Symptoms can range from very mild to

debilitating and are usually correlated with the severity of organ descent.

How can I address it? Nothing can reverse a prolapse, although physical therapy treatment has been shown to significantly reduce its severity. In physical therapy, you learn ways to strengthen your pelvic floor, as well as strategies to modify posture, body mechanics, toileting mechanics, and pressure management in order to reduce the stress on your organs. A pessary, also known as a vaginal orthotic, can be inserted to help keep your organs where they belong. Surgery can also be beneficial,

even life-changing, if conservative methods fail; however, PT is strongly recommended before and after surgery because, while the operation may repair the tissue, it has no effect on the factors contributing to your prolapse.

Prolapse is experienced very differently by each individual due to the contribution of lifestyle and coping factors, which is why it is important to receive individualized assessment of your particular symptoms. Reach out to me at catherine@breathe-blossom.com to begin your path to healing.

You feel strong pelvic pressure after you lift something heavy. You notice tissue bulging out of your vulva when you are taking a shower. You feel like you cannot fully empty your bowels or bladder and may leak urine AFTER you pee and go to stand up.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? If so, you may be experiencing some symptoms of pelvic organ prolapse (POP).



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Reference: 1. Vergeldt TFM, Weemhoff M, IntHout J, Kluijvers KB. Risk factors for pelvic organ prolapse and its recurrence: a systematic review. *International Urogynecology Journal*. 2015;26:1559-1573.