

Rectal Prolapse

Rectal prolapse is a condition that occurs when the rectum protrudes through the anus, leading to both physical discomfort and emotional distress. While it may sound alarming, many people may not be aware of this condition or the options available for treatment.

What is Rectal Prolapse?

Rectal prolapse occurs when the rectal wall loses its support and descends through the anal opening. This can happen in varying degrees, from a mild protrusion during bowel movements to a more severe form where the rectum remains outside the body. Rectal prolapse can affect individuals of all ages and sexes but is most common in older adults, particularly women.

Common Causes

Several factors can contribute to the development of rectal prolapse:

1. **Weakness of Pelvic Floor Muscles:** Aging, childbirth, and connective tissue disorders can weaken the muscles and ligaments that support the rectum.
2. **Chronic Straining:** Conditions that cause chronic constipation or straining during bowel movements can increase the risk of prolapse.
3. **Increased Abdominal Pressure:** Conditions that increase abdominal pressure, such as chronic cough, can contribute to the weakening of pelvic support structures.
4. **Previous Pelvic Surgery:** Surgical procedures involving the pelvis, such as hysterectomy, may increase the risk of developing rectal prolapse.

Symptoms

The symptoms of rectal prolapse can vary depending on the severity of the condition and may include:

- A visible protrusion of the rectum through the anus, especially during bowel movements.
- A feeling of fullness or pressure in the rectal area.
- Discomfort or pain, particularly during bowel movements.
- Fecal incontinence or difficulty controlling bowel movements.
- Mucus discharge from the rectum.

- Changes in bowel habits, including constipation.

When to Seek Medical Help

If you experience symptoms of rectal prolapse, especially a visible protrusion or changes in bowel habits, it's important to consult a healthcare professional

Diagnosis

Diagnosing rectal prolapse typically involves a physical examination and a review of your medical history. Your doctor may perform:

- **Digital Rectal Examination:** To assess the condition of the rectum and surrounding structures.
- **Toilet exam:** The best place to look for prolapse is to sit on the toilet and strain while the doctor looks with a mirror.
- **Anoscopy or Sigmoidoscopy:** To visualize the rectum and rule out other conditions.
- **Imaging Tests:** In some cases, imaging studies such as defecography may be used to evaluate the extent of the prolapse and assess pelvic floor function.

Treatment Options

The treatment for rectal prolapse depends on the severity of the condition and the symptoms experienced. Options may include:

1. **Conservative Management:** For mild cases, lifestyle changes may help manage symptoms:
 - Increasing dietary fiber and fluid intake to promote regular bowel movements.
 - Working with a pelvic floor PT to optimize coordination
 - Avoiding straining during bowel movements.
2. **Medications:** If constipation is a contributing factor, medications may be prescribed to help regulate bowel movements and prevent straining.
3. **Surgical Intervention:** In more severe cases or when conservative measures fail, surgery may be necessary.
 - **Rectopexy:** A procedure to attach the rectum to the surrounding tissues to provide support.

- **Ventral Rectopexy:** A procedure that uses mesh to help support the rectum
 - **Perineal approaches:** Various procedures performed through the anus to address the prolapse
4. **Postoperative Care:** After surgery, it's important to follow your healthcare provider's instructions for recovery, including diet modifications and pelvic floor rehabilitation.

Prevention

While not all cases of rectal prolapse can be prevented, certain lifestyle changes can help reduce your risk:

- **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Reducing excess weight can alleviate pressure on the pelvic floor.
- **Practice Good Bowel Habits:** Respond to urges promptly, avoid prolonged straining, and maintain regular bowel movements.
- **Stay Active:** Regular exercise can strengthen pelvic floor muscles and support digestive health.
- **Pelvic Floor Exercises:** Working with a pelvic floor physical therapist can help you learn good exercises for your specific needs.

Conclusion

Rectal prolapse can be a challenging condition, but understanding its causes, symptoms, and treatment options can empower individuals to seek help and manage their health effectively. If you experience symptoms of rectal prolapse, don't hesitate to reach out to a healthcare professional. With the right approach and treatment, you can regain control and improve your quality of life. Remember, prioritizing your health is essential, and addressing concerns early can lead to better outcomes.