

Pelvic Floor Disorders and Common Treatments

The **pelvic floor** is a group of muscles and tissues that help support the pelvic organs and keep them in place. A **pelvic floor disorder (PFD)** is a condition in which the muscles or connective tissues of the pelvic floor weaken or are injured, causing discomfort and other problems. PFDs can include bladder symptoms, bowel control problems, and prolapse (organs drop or press into the vagina).

Many women are embarrassed to talk about their symptoms, but **effective treatments are available**. Not all treatments are right for all women.

Talk to your healthcare provider about your symptoms, your health, and your possible treatment options.



Nonsurgical Treatments



Pelvic floor muscle training (also called Kegel exercises) may improve the symptoms of prolapse.



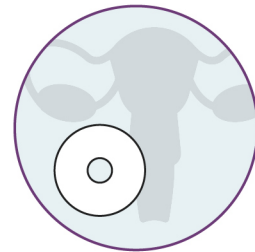
Bladder training—using the bathroom on a set schedule and gradually extending time between visits—reduces bladder symptoms.



Lifestyle changes—such as maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, eating a high-fiber diet, avoiding foods that stimulate the bladder or bowel, and getting regular exercise—can also reduce PFD symptoms.



Medications may relieve symptoms of urinary or fecal incontinence.



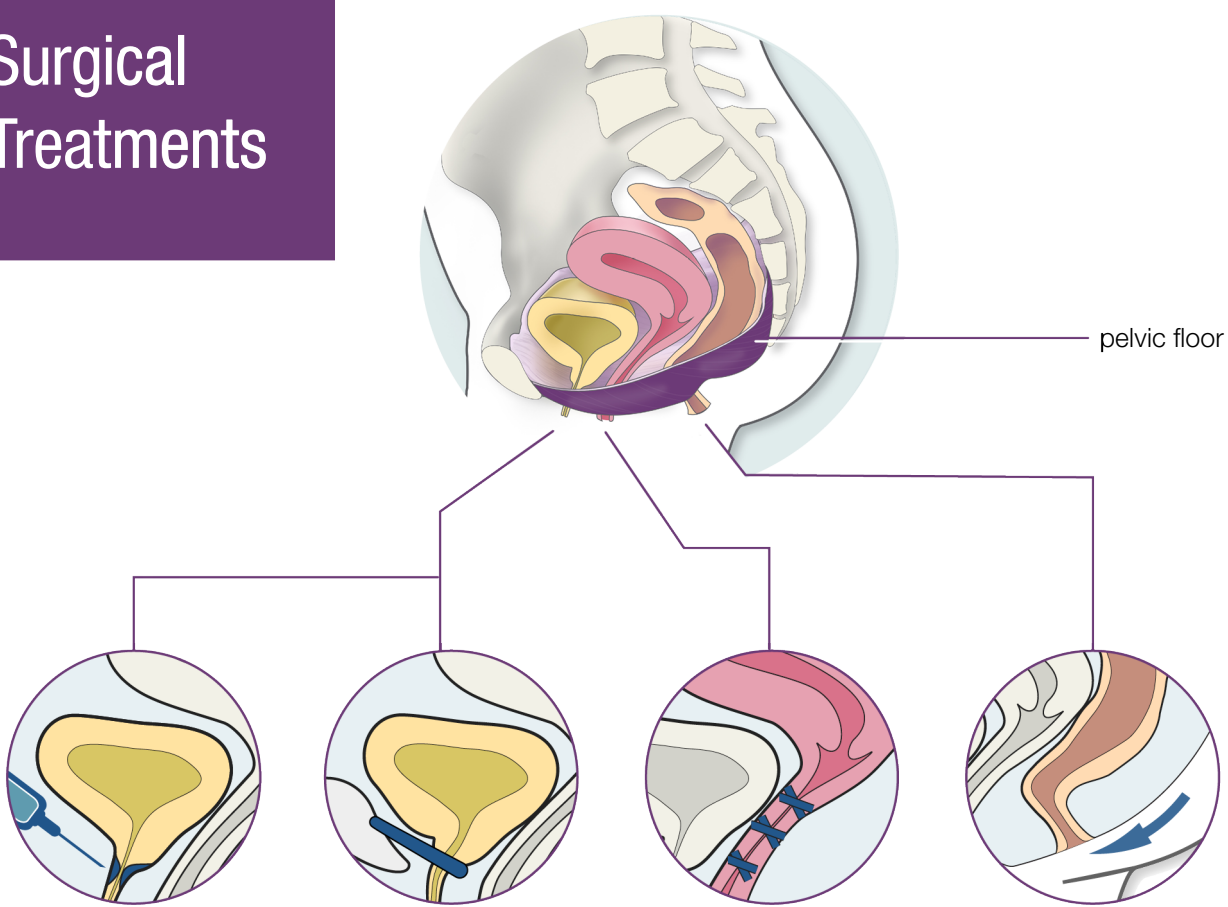
Pessaries—devices inserted into the vagina to support pelvic organs—can treat prolapse and urinary incontinence.



Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development



Surgical Treatments



“Bulking agents”

can be injected near the bladder neck and urethra to make the tissues thicker and close the bladder opening. Repeat injections may be needed over time.

A mid-urethral sling

can be surgically implanted to support the urethra and treat urinary incontinence.

Colpocleisis is a surgical procedure that narrows and shortens the vagina to treat prolapse.

Bowel surgery can help repair damaged anal sphincter muscles or certain types of prolapse that lead to fecal incontinence.

Combination treatments—using nonsurgical and surgical treatments together—may be the most effective for reducing symptoms and improving quality of life for women with PFDs.

NICHD research on PFDs aims to **find low-risk procedures and devices** for treating PFDs and **evaluate treatments and treatment combinations** to determine what works best.^{1,2}

Learn more about pelvic floor disorders on the NICHD website: <https://nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/pelvicfloor>

1 Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2019). Release: Surgery may benefit women with two types of urinary incontinence.

2 Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2019). Release: Mesh implants have similar outcomes to hysterectomy for vaginal prolapse repair.