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The Royal Liverpool  
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## Patient information

# Rectocele

## Surgical Speciality

### What is a rectocele?

The rectum (back passage) is the last part of the bowel, which acts as a temporary storage area for bowel motions. A rectocele happens when the rectum pushes the back wall of the vagina forward, causing a noticeable bulge into the vagina. In mild cases the rectocele may be felt as a small bulge inside the vagina while, in severe cases, the bulge may be hanging outside of the vagina causing a prolapse.

### What causes a rectocele?

In women, the front wall of the rectum and the rear wall of the vagina lie close to each other and is therefore called the recto-vaginal wall. This wall can become weak or stretched by pressure, which then allows the front wall of the rectum to bulge into the vagina.

### Some factors that may cause a rectocele include:

- Vaginal (normal) childbirth.
- Giving birth to more than one baby.
- A long and difficult labour, or the use of forceps during delivery.
- Episiotomy or tearing during childbirth or Hysterectomy or other pelvic surgery.
- Chronic constipation and straining to pass bowel motions.
- Old age.

### What are the symptoms of a rectocele?

### The symptoms may be vaginal, rectal or both, and can include:

- Constipation.
- Problems with passing a bowel motion, because the stool becomes caught in the rectocele.
- The feeling that your bowel isn't completely emptied after passing a motion.
- Occasional faecal incontinence.
- A sensation of pressure within the pelvis.
- The feeling that something is falling down or falling out within your pelvis.
- Lower abdominal pain or lower back pain.
- A bulge felt inside the vagina.
- Vaginal bleeding that's not related to the menstrual cycle.
- Painful or impossible vaginal intercourse.

Symptoms are worsened by standing up and eased by lying down.

### **What is the treatment for a rectocele?**

Milder cases can be treated by measures such as management of constipation, and exercises to strengthen the pelvic muscles. Surgery may be needed in very severe cases.

### **Treatment options**

Generally speaking, a rectocele with no obvious symptoms doesn't need medical treatment, but it is wise to pay attention to diet and other lifestyle factors that contribute to constipation.

#### **Treatment options may include:**

- High fibre diet
- Fibre supplements
- Drinking at least six to eight glasses of water per day
- Stool softeners (don't use laxatives)
- Instruction on how to help yourself to pass a bowel motion; for example, you may be advised to gently press a finger against the rear wall of the vagina while toileting
- Don't strain on the toilet
- Hormone replacement therapy for postmenopausal women
- Pelvic floor exercises.

### **Surgery**

Surgery may be needed if the rectocele doesn't respond to other treatments and is causing symptoms. Unfortunately, the rectocele will come back even after an operation in about 10 per cent of cases.

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### **Further information**

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