



Rectocele

What is a rectocele?

A rectocele is forward bulging or displacement of the rectum into the vagina. This creates a pouch in which stool can accumulate and become “trapped,” often making it difficult to initiate or complete a bowel movement. Patients with this condition often describe having to push or “splint” inside or near their vagina in order to complete a bowel movement.

What causes a rectocele?

A rectocele is caused by a weakening of the tissue between the rectum and vagina. This allows the wall of the rectum to push forward against the back wall of the vagina. Weakening of this rectovaginal wall occurs due to a combination of aging and pelvic floor stretching from childbirth. Rectoceles may be seen in younger women after difficult or multiple deliveries.

Do all rectoceles need to be repaired?

Many women will have small or even larger rectoceles that do not cause any symptoms. As long as bowel movements are occurring normally, a rectocele does not have to be repaired. In women who are having difficulty with bowel movements, correction of diarrhea or constipation with bulk fiber laxatives often helps considerably.

In those women who continue to have difficulty, surgical repair of the rectocele is often beneficial. Rectocele surgery involves strengthening the weakened wall between the rectum and vagina. Depending on a variety of factors, your surgeon may recommend a repair of the rectocele through the rectum, or through the vagina. Both of these repairs are done as an outpatient procedure, which means no overnight hospital stay is required.

Many women with rectoceles also have associated bulging of their bladders (cystocele) or small intestines (enterocele) into their vagina. Before surgery is planned, a test called videodefecography is usually performed to determine if these other conditions need to be repaired as well. In this test, a barium paste is placed in the rectum and video x-rays are taken of the rectum at rest, and during passage of the barium paste. Often, an oral contrast dye is also given during the test in order to detect associated prolapse of the small intestine.