

## **What are Pelvic Floor Disorders?**

### ***What is the Pelvic Floor?***

The pelvic floor is a term we use to describe the muscles, ligaments and connective tissue that provide support for a woman's internal organs (including the bowel, bladder, uterus, vagina, and rectum). Not only does the pelvic floor prevent these organs from falling down or out, but it also plays a very important role in making the organs function properly. The brain controls the muscles of the pelvic floor by way of nerves. Any medical conditions or injuries that impact the health of nerves (such as diabetes, Parkinson's disease, stroke, back surgery, spinal stenosis, or childbirth trauma) can result in weakness of the pelvic floor muscles.

### ***What are Pelvic Floor Disorders?***

Women with weakness of the pelvic muscles or tears in the connective tissue may begin to have problems controlling their bladder and bowels. They often describe urine leakage (urinary incontinence), bowel gas or stool leakage (anal incontinence), difficulty emptying their bladder (voiding dysfunction), overactive bladder, or having a bowel movement (constipation). Some women also feel or see tissue coming out of the opening of their vagina. This can be a prolapsing cervix and uterus or the walls of the vagina.

It is possible to experience one or several of these signs and symptoms of pelvic floor disorders. Medical specialists called urogynecologists are specially trained to diagnose and treat these problems. We encourage you to speak with a urogynecologist and learn how he or she can help improve your quality of life by treating your incontinence or prolapse issues.

### ***Urogynecology***

The field of urogynecology is a subspecialty within Obstetrics and Gynecology and is dedicated to the study and treatment of pelvic floor disorders in women, in all the various ways that it can present itself.

Urogynecologists have completed medical school and a residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology or Urology. These doctors become specialists with additional training and experience in the evaluation and treatment of conditions that affect the female pelvic organs, and the muscles and connective tissue that support the organs. Many, though not all, have completed formal fellowships (additional training after residency) that focused on the surgical and non-surgical treatment of non-cancerous gynecologic problems. As is always the case, you should feel very comfortable asking about the training and expertise of any doctor caring for you.