Biological grafts and plastic mesh inlay for vaginal wall prolapse repair

This is to be read in conjunction with the posterior repair or the anterior repair patient information sheets

Patient Information
Biological grafts and plastic mesh inlay for vaginal wall prolapse repair

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• What materials can be used
• Where the material is placed
• Are there any additional risks
• Potential benefits of the use of these materials

Reason for use of surgical materials
Having discussed your particular problem your doctor may decide that the operation for your prolapse might be strengthened by the use of surgical material. Such indications may include:
1. recurrent prolapse
2. asthma / chronic cough
3. obesity

What materials can be used
There are essentially two types of material that can be used:
1. Biological grafts – material (bowel or skin) derived from either pig or cow. This tissue is highly processed to remove cells and viruses so that only a fibrous inner material remains.
2. Plastic mesh – the plastic meshes that are used are a plastic called polypropylene (Prolene) and the construction of the mesh is fairly standardised – either knitted or weaved, with gaps in the mesh large enough to allow certain cells of the body to pass through them. These cells are involved in finding and killing harmful bacteria. The meshes manufactured by different companies however are not exactly the same. They vary in flexibility, stretch, brittleness and contraction.

Where the material is placed
The material arrives as a sheet which is cut to the desired size. To support the front vaginal wall, it is placed between the bladder and the vaginal skin, having made a vertical incision in the front vaginal wall as described in the ‘An operation for anterior vaginal wall prolapse’ leaflet. Similarly, to support the back vaginal wall it is placed between the bowel and the vaginal skin, having made a vertical incision in the back vaginal wall as described in the ‘An operation for posterior vaginal wall prolapse’ leaflet. The graft or mesh is often fixed into place with surgical stitches.

Are there any additional risks
1. There is some evidence that these grafts and meshes may provide a longer or better repair but the amount of evidence is small and so far the quality of this evidence is poor.
2. If an infection occurs at the operation site it can be more difficult to treat and may require that the graft / mesh is removed.
3. The mesh may contract over time and could narrow the vagina causing pain on intercourse.

4. If the healing is poor over a mesh, the mesh may start to push through the vaginal incision. This is called ‘mesh exposure/extrusion’ and can occur in up to 20% of patients when the plastic mesh is used (not the biological graft).

Causes of mesh exposure might be:
- infection
- early intercourse
- poor vaginal skin quality
- smoking
- certain diseases

5. The long-term risks of these materials are presently unknown.

Potential benefits of the use of these materials

1. They may allow a vaginal wall to be supported without reducing the girth of the vagina. Sometimes standard operations result in narrowing of the vagina which can cause pain on intercourse.

2. If an operation has been done once and hasn’t worked, these materials may add further strength to the repeat operation although this has not been proven.

Useful references

Where can I obtain more information?
Bladder & Bowel Foundation
SATRA Innovation Park
Rockingham Road
Kettering, Northants, NN16 9JH
Nurse Helpline for medical advice: 0845 345 0165
Counsellor Helpline: 0870 770 3246
General enquiries: 01536 533255
Fax: 01536 533240
mailto:info@bladderandbowelfoundation.org
http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Also:
http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/IPG267PublicInfo.doc
http://www.easyhealth.org.uk/
http://www.mhra.gov.uk
Things I need to know before I have my operation

Please list below any questions you may have, having read this leaflet.

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Please describe what your expectations are from surgery.

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Comments, compliments, concerns or complaints

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However we do appreciate that there may be an occasion where you, or your family, feel dissatisfied with the standard of service you receive. Please do not hesitate to tell us about your concerns as this helps us to learn from your experience and to improve services for future patients.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

This service aims to advise and support patients, families and carers and help sort out problems quickly on your behalf.

This service is available, and based, at The James Cook University Hospital but also covers the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton, our community hospitals and community health services. Please ask a member of staff for further information.