

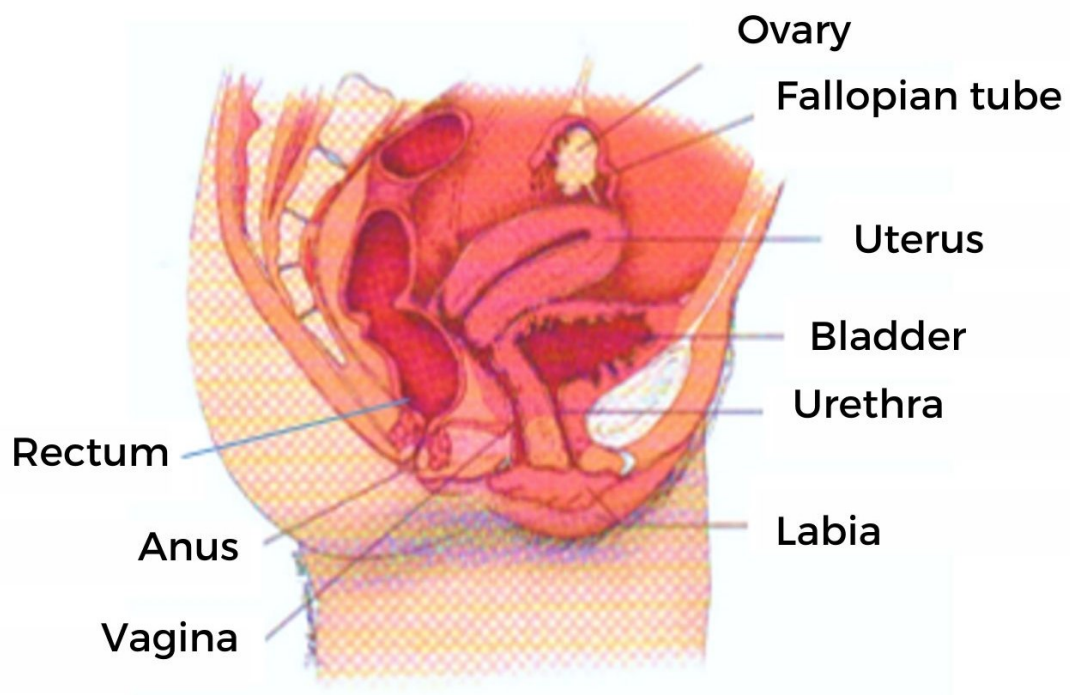
## Hysterectomy and sexuality

### Pelvic structure and function after hysterectomy

A uterus is an organ that is about the size of a woman's fist and usually weighs about 100 grams. A hysterectomy, meaning the removal of the uterus, will alter the structure of the pelvic floor somewhat. During a hysterectomy, the uterus is removed in its entirety, including the body of the uterus, the cervical canal, and the external orifice. The function of the vagina and outer genitalia will remain completely functionally unaltered during the surgery. Ovarian function will also remain the same after the hysterectomy, if they are not removed as well.

Menstruation will end after hysterectomy. Pregnancy will not be possible after the hysterectomy, so pregnancy prevention is no longer necessary. It is however good to keep in mind that a hysterectomy can cause the menopause to start a few months or a few years earlier.

### Pelvic area structure



### Self-image and femininity

It is completely natural if the changes to your body and the scars caused by the hysterectomy invoke many feelings and questions about your femininity and self-image. The feeling of loss caused by the hysterectomy can affect your perception of yourself. In addition, factors

concerning such as appearance, motherhood and the ability to produce can affect how you feel about the hysterectomy. Your self-image can also stay the same or even improve after the hysterectomy.

## **Sexual function**

According to present knowledge, a hysterectomy that has been performed for benign reasons does not affect the different parts of female sexuality. A hysterectomy does not lessen sexual pleasure, decrease the number or quality of the orgasms, affect vaginal lubrication, or decrease satisfaction towards your own sexuality. The lack of symptoms, bleeding and the lack of need for birth control can even improve your quality of life. In addition, it can lead to less pain during intercourse. You can try having intercourse after 3 to 4 weeks after the surgery at the earliest, but if the hysterectomy has been carried out using laparoscopic surgery, may require a 2-month long recovery period. Ask your doctor for more information. There are no restrictions on sexual activities after the recovery period ends.

## **Pelvic floor muscle exercises and mucous membrane care**

Keeping the pelvic floor muscles in good shape is important after a hysterectomy, because the pelvic area structure has been somewhat altered by the hysterectomy. You can improve their condition and prevent urinary incontinence by doing pelvic muscle exercises. Good pelvic floor muscles improve sexual pleasure as well.

The dryness of the vaginal mucous membrane causes sensitivity and stinging. Dry membranes can be treated with emollient lotions and oils. There are also times in a woman's life when intercourse requires lubrication. Dry mucous membranes cause pain and wounds to the mucosa during intercourse. If you wish to buy water, oil or silicone based lubricants, they are available at pharmacies, department stores and sex shops.

Ask the staff to get more instructions on pelvic floor muscle exercises and mucous membrane care.

## **Share your thoughts**

It is helpful to discuss the feelings and thoughts you have about the hysterectomy with the staff and with your intimate partner, should you have one. Sometimes it is very difficult to express how you are feeling. If you like, you can use this guide to start the conversation with your partner.

It is also possible to make an appointment where you can discuss with a sexual counsellor at the Turku and Salo Tyks hospitals.