Patient-Related Instruction 19-6

Boat at the Dock—Role of Pelvic Floor Muscles in Organ Prolapse

- Imagine there is a boat tied to a dock (A). The pelvic organs (i.e., bladder, uterus, and rectum) are the boat. The ropes holding the boat to the dock are the ligaments that support the organs from above. The water is the pelvic floor muscle.
- If the water level drops (B) (i.e., loss of support or weakness of the pelvic floor muscles), the boat (organs) hangs on the ropes (ligaments). Eventually the ropes stretch out and break, resulting in the boat (organs) falling down (i.e., prolapse).
- If you pull the boat back up by replacing the ropes (i.e., organ suspension surgery) without raising the water level (i.e., pelvic floor muscles strengthening) (C), the boat will continue to hang on the ropes and eventually falls down again (i.e., prolapse). Falling happens quicker if you jump on the boat (i.e., increase pressure in the abdomen from cough, sneeze, lift, or improper exercise).
- Long-lasting results are more likely if you raise the water level (i.e., pelvic floor muscles strengthening) and stop jumping on the boat (i.e., reduce unnecessary increases in abdominal pressure). In this case, the ropes (ligaments) may or may not need to be replaced (i.e., ligament and pelvic organ surgery).