

Urinary Incontinence

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Urinary incontinence means that you cannot always hold your urine. It is a common — and treatable— problem.

Incontinence is often temporary.

When you urinate, muscles in the wall of your bladder contract. This forces urine out of your bladder and into your urethra. At the same time, muscles around your urethra relax, letting urine pass out of your body.

If you are incontinent it is most likely due to problems with your muscles that help to hold or release urine.

Causes of Incontinence

- In men: enlarged prostate or prostatitis (inflamed prostate, sometimes caused by a bacterial infection)
- In women: pregnancy, childbirth, menopause and the structure of the female urinary tract
- In both men and women: aging, illness, injury; weak pelvic muscles; urinary tract infections.

Types of Incontinence

There are three common types of incontinence:

■ Stress incontinence:

If you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or put other pressure on your bladder, you may have stress incontinence.

Weak pelvic floor muscles, sometimes caused by childbirth or prostate surgery, can cause stress incontinence. It is the most common form of incontinence in women.

■ Urge incontinence:

Urge incontinence is when your bladder contracts at improper times. You may feel the urge to urinate suddenly and lose urine.

Or your bladder may empty during sleep, after drinking a small amount of liquid or upon hearing water run. Causes of urge incontinence include disease, stroke, brain tumors, nerve or muscle injury and surgery.

■ Overflow incontinence:

If you always have a full bladder and it constantly leaks urine, you may have overflow incontinence. This type of incontinence is more common in men.

There are two main causes of overflow incontinence: weak bladder muscles due to nerve damage from diabetes or other diseases, or a urethra blocked by a tumor or urinary stones.

Treating Incontinence

There are several ways to treat incontinence. Your health care provider may talk with you about these common treatments:

- Kegel exercises to reduce or cure stress leakage. These exercises strengthen or retrain pelvic floor muscles and sphincter muscles. You will receive information on how to do these exercises.
- timed voiding (urinating) or bladder training for urge and overflow incontinence. For timed voiding, you fill in a chart that shows urinating and leaking patterns. You use the chart to empty your bladder before you would otherwise leak urine.

Bladder training uses biofeedback and muscle conditioning to alter your bladder's schedule for storing and emptying urine.

- biofeedback to relieve stress and urge incontinence. This treatment measures and tracks when your bladder and urethral muscles contract. By knowing this, you can gain control over these muscles. Medicines to reduce many types of leakage.

Your health care provider may prescribe a medicine to:

- inhibit contractions of an overactive bladder
- relax muscles so a bladder can empty during urination
- tighten muscles to prevent leakage
- restore normal function of muscles used in urination.

Some medicines may have harmful side effects if used for a long time. Talk with your provider about the risks and benefits of taking a medicine on a long-term basis.

- surgery to relieve stress incontinence if other treatments have not worked.