

Urinary Incontinence and Its Treatment

Do You Have Urinary Incontinence?

Look at the questions listed below. If you can answer "yes" to any these questions, you may have a problem with your bladder called "urinary incontinence."

- Do you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh, or exercise?
- Do you leak urine on the way to the bathroom?
- Do you wake up between 2 and 4 times at night in order to go to the bathroom?
- Do you need to know the locations of bathrooms when you travel or go shopping?
- Are you afraid that you will leak urine during sex?

What Is Urinary Incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is unwanted leakage of urine. The bladder normally stores urine until you want to empty it. If you leak urine when you do not intend to, you have a problem with urinary incontinence.

Urinary incontinence can happen to men or women, at any age, although it is most commonly reported in older people and women. More than 12 million Americans suffer from urinary incontinence, and about one in three people over the age of 60 is incontinent.

Incontinence is not a life-threatening problem, but it can be very embarrassing. No one is incontinent on purpose. Incontinence can be short term, referred to as transient incontinence. This can occur in older people and may be caused by mental confusion, infection, medications, depression, immobility, constipation, and more.

What Is Urinary Incontinence? continued

Incontinence can also be long term, known as established. There are four basic types of established incontinence. Two types, urge and stress incontinence, are related to the body's failure to store urine. Established incontinence can also result from failure to empty urine, known as an overflow condition.

Stress Incontinence. This sort of incontinence normally occurs during exercise, coughing, sneezing, laughing, or any body movement that puts pressure on the bladder. Stress incontinence occurs most frequently in women and is thought to be due to pelvic relaxation of tissues from childbirth or aging. Stress incontinence is often worse when the person is overweight.

Urge Incontinence. This is the urgent need to pass urine and the inability to control it. There is a sudden bladder contraction that cannot be consciously stopped. Some people may have the symptoms of both stress and urge incontinence.

Overflow Incontinence. This may occur when a person cannot completely empty their bladder, causing the bladder to become overfilled and leak. Prostate enlargement in men may cause this type of incontinence.

Can Your Urinary Incontinence Be Treated?

In the past, the causes of incontinence were not well understood. As a result, many people did not want to talk about their problems with their doctor, or they tried to explain their problem and felt that their doctors did not understand what they were going through.

Today, however, there are many effective treatments for urinary incontinence. About 80% of people with incontinence can be helped or cured.

How Is Urinary Incontinence Treated?

To help find the problem that is causing the urinary incontinence, your doctor will want to know about your medical history and will ask to perform a physical examination. In addition, your doctor may request certain tests, such as X-rays, blood tests, and urine tests. Your doctor may also want to perform special tests to find out how much urine the bladder holds, if the bladder may be blocked, and how much urine is left in the bladder after it is emptied.

Because incontinence is a symptom and not a disease, the method of treatment depends on the diagnosis. Sometimes simple things such as changes in diet, fluid intake, or medication can cure the incontinence. Sometimes other types of treatments are needed, including the following:

Scheduled Toileting. With this treatment, you go to the bathroom on a 2- to 4-hour schedule.

Bladder Retraining. Here you go to the bathroom on a schedule, but the length of time between trips to the bathroom is gradually increased.

Pelvic Muscle Rehabilitation. This involves pelvic muscle exercises, performed alone or helped with biofeedback, vaginal weights, or pelvic floor stimulation.

Medications. Certain medications may be prescribed to improve incontinence.

Surgery. If incontinence does not respond to lifestyle changes or medication, surgery may be needed. The type of surgery performed will depend on the type and cause of the incontinence. Your doctor can talk to you about the type of procedure that you might need.

***How Is Urinary
Incontinence
Treated?
continued***

For those people whose incontinence cannot be cured, and for those who are waiting to be treated, there are many devices and products to manage incontinence. Your practitioner will discuss with you the product or device that is best to manage your particular problem.