

Urinary Incontinence and its Treatment

Do You Have Urinary Incontinence?

If you can answer yes to any of the questions below, 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 a night 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 urinary incontinence.

Men and women of any age can develop urinary incontinence, although it is most commonly reported in women and older people. More than 3.3 million Canadians have urinary incontinence, which represents about 10 percent of the total population. About one in three people over the age of 65 is incontinent.

Incontinence is not a life-threatening problem, but it can be very embarrassing. 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, or other reasons.

Incontinence can also be long term, referred to as *established incontinence*. There are four basic types of established incontinence.

Stress Incontinence. This is a problem with the bladder's ability to hold urine, caused by weakness in the pelvic muscles that support the bladder. Leakage occurs during exercise, coughing, sneezing, laughing, or any type of strain that puts pressure on the bladder. Stress incontinence occurs most often in women is thought to occur from relaxation of pelvic tissues due to childbirth or aging. Stress incontinence can be aggravated by being overweight.

Urge Incontinence. This is another malfunction in the bladder's ability to store

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urine. Urge incontinence is associated with an urgent need to pass urine caused by a sudden bladder contraction that can't be stopped. Urine leakage occurs.

Mixed Incontinence. This is incontinence that has characteristics of both stress incontinence and urge incontinence.

Overflow Incontinence. This is caused by a failure of the bladder to sufficiently empty urine. The bladder becomes overfilled, and leakage results. Prostate enlargement in men is a common cause of overflow 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 doctors and other health care providers, or they tried to explain their problem and felt that their health care providers did not understand what they were going through.

Today, however, there are many effective treatments for urinary incontinence. According to the Canadian Continence Foundation, "*Urinary incontinence can be resolved, better managed, or better contained in 100% of people affected.*"

How is Urinary Incontinence Treated?

To find the cause of your urinary incontinence, your health care provider will want to know about your health history and will ask to perform a physical examination. In addition, you may undergo certain tests such as X-rays, blood tests, and urine tests, and other special tests that evaluate how much urine the bladder can hold, 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. Often changes in diet or fluid intake can cure the incontinence. Sometimes medication is required. Occasionally other treatments are beneficial, including:

Scheduled Toileting

Going to the bathroom on a 2- to 4hour schedule.

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How is Urinary Incontinence Treated? (Continued)

Bladder Retraining

Going to the bathroom on a schedule, but increasing the time between trips.

Pelvic Muscle Rehabilitation

Pelvic muscle exercises, occasionally performed with biofeedback, vaginal weights, or pelvic floor stimulation, if required.

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 team can help you make this decision.

For those whose incontinence cannot be totally cured, and for those waiting to be treated, there are many devices and products designed to manage leakage. Your health care provider can discuss these with you to help you select the best option.

For More Information

Canadian Continence Foundation. <http://www.canadiancontinence.ca/>

A non-profit organization providing information on the condition and treatment options that can restore quality of life. Also lists incontinence health professionals throughout the country by region.

Tel: (705) 750-4600

Email: help@canadiancontinence.ca

Women's Health Matters (Canadian). http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/centres/pelvic_health/incontinence/index.html

An extensive online resource for a variety of women's health issues created by Women's College Hospital and Women's College Research Institute in Toronto.

Women's Bladder Health. (Canadian) www.womensbladderhealth.com

Canadian Urological Association http://www.cua.org/patient_information_e.asp
Education for women and men.

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