

The Continence and Support Center

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OVERVIEW OF URINARY INCONTINENCE

Do you have Urinary Incontinence?

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

- Do you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh, exercise?
- Do you leak urine on the way to the bathroom?
- Do you wake up between 2 and 4 times a night in order to go to the bathroom?
- Do you need to know the locations of the 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, infections, medications, depression, immobility, constipation, and more.

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 frequently in women and is thought to be due to pelvic relaxations 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.
- Neurogenic Incontinence - This occurs when there is a disruption in the nerves that connect the bladder to the brain. This can result from chronic conditions like diabetes, multiple sclerosis and trauma

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, 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?

Because incontinence is a symptom not a disease, the method of treatment depends on the diagnosis. Sometimes simple things such as changes in diet, fluid intake, or medications 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 with the help of 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 cause of the incontinence. Your doctor can talk to you about the type of procedure that you might need.

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 your particular problem.