Improving urinary incontinence

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

• what urinary incontinence is
• things you can do that will help
• how to do pelvic floor exercises

What is urinary incontinence?

If you are unable to control your bladder, you may leak urine out of your body even when you don’t mean to. If this happens often, you may have urinary incontinence.

Urinary incontinence can affect about 1 in every 3 adults. It can be caused by many things. It becomes more common as we age. Our bladders change and may not be able to hold or control our urine in the same way. This can cause leaks.
Urinary incontinence can affect how comfortable you feel being in public. But, there are changes you can make to your everyday activities that can help.

These include:

• **Reduce or remove caffeine from your diet**
  Caffeine can affect how well your bladder works.
  Even 1 cup of coffee or tea may have too much caffeine for your bladder.

  Foods and drinks with caffeine include:
  - coffee or tea
  - sodas and pops
  - chocolate

  Try to reduce or remove caffeine for 2 weeks. Use a diary to write down your how many times you experience urinary incontinence before and after you make this change. If your symptoms improve, continue to avoid caffeine.

• **Reduce or quit smoking**
  Smoking can make urinary incontinence worse. Talk to your family doctor about ways that can help you stop smoking. Quitting smoking will help your body in many other ways.

• **Drink more fluids**
  Drinking more fluids (not including alcohol or caffeine) can improve your bladder control. When you don’t drink enough fluids, your urine becomes concentrated. This can irritate your bladder wall and cause leaks.

• **Avoid alcohol**
  Drinking alcohol can make your urinary incontinence worse. Reducing the amount you drink or not drinking alcohol at all can help improve your symptoms.
• **Lose weight**
  If you are overweight, trying to lose weight can improve your symptoms. It is best to lose weight by changing your diet and exercising regularly.

  The Canada Food Guide has information about healthy eating. Visit the website:

• **Know your medications**
  Some medications may cause urinary incontinence. Please talk to your family doctor about this.

• **Do pelvic floor muscle exercises**
  Building the muscles that hold your bladder in place can help your urinary incontinence symptoms.

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**Pelvic floor exercises help manage urinary incontinence**

**What are pelvic floor muscles?**
Pelvic muscles hold your bladder, uterus and bowel in place. They can become weak and sag in women after having a baby, because of little or no exercise or as part of aging.

With weak muscles you may leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise. Pelvic muscle exercises make these muscles stronger.

You can also talk to your doctor to get more information.
How do I find my pelvic floor muscles?

Find a quiet place and sit down. Try to squeeze the muscles that prevent you from passing gas. Try not to tighten your buttocks (bottom) or stomach muscles, and don’t hold your breath.

To do pelvic floor exercises follow these steps:

1. Squeeze your pelvic muscle.
2. Hold and count to 3 slowly like: 1…and 2…and 3.
3. Then relax and count to 3 slowly: 1…and 2…and 3.
4. Repeat.

Remember:

- Don’t hold your breath while doing these exercises.
- You can do them while lying, sitting or standing.
- 10 exercises are called 1 set. Do 1 set, 5 times a day.
- As you get better at doing these exercises you can count up to 5 and then relax for a count of 5.
- You must relax your muscles for the same amount of time as you squeeze them.

You will need to do these exercises for 3 to 6 months before you will notice improvement in your urinary incontinence.

For more information

Visit these useful websites to learn more about urinary incontinence:

- **Canadian Nurse Continence Advisors:**
  www.cnca.ca/UI.html

- **Canadian Incontinence Foundation:**
  www.canadiancontinence.ca/EN/what-is-urinary-incontinence.php