

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. When this happens often you may have **urinary incontinence**.

Urinary incontinence affects about 1 in every 3 adults. It can be caused by many things and becomes more common as we age. Our bladders change over time and may not be able to hold or control our urine in the same way. This can cause leaks.

There are different types of urinary incontinence:

- **Stress incontinence:** When doing physical activities puts pressure on the bladder (such as lifting heavy objects, coughing, sneezing, laughing) and you leak urine.
- **Urge incontinence:** When you have the sudden urge to urinate (pee) and you can't hold your pee until you get to the toilet. This happens because the bladder contracts when it shouldn't.
- **Overflow incontinence:** The bladder becomes full and there is frequent leaking. You may not feel the urge to pee and your bladder doesn't empty completely.
- **Mixed incontinence:** A combination of stress and urge urinary incontinence.
- **Functional incontinence:** A physical or medical disability stops you from reaching the toilet on time. For example, you may not be able to unbutton your clothes quickly enough to pee or toilets may not be available.

See your doctor to know what type of urinary incontinence you have.

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.

- **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. Write down 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 commercial tobacco (cigarettes) can make urinary incontinence worse. Talk to your family doctor about ways you can stop or reduce smoking.

- **Drink more fluids, not including alcohol or caffeine**

Drinking more fluids like water can improve your bladder control. When we don't drink enough fluids, our urine becomes concentrated. This can irritate the bladder wall and cause leaks.

- **Avoid alcohol**

Drinking alcohol can make urinary incontinence worse. Reducing the amount you drink or not drinking alcohol at all can help improve your symptoms.

- **Keep your weight within a healthy range for you**

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:

<http://hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>

- **Know your medications**

Some medications may cause urinary incontinence. Please talk to your family doctor about the medications you take.

- **Do pelvic floor muscle exercises**

Building the muscles that hold your bladder in place can help your urinary incontinence symptoms.

Pelvic floor exercises help manage urinary incontinence
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What are the pelvic floor muscles?

Pelvic muscles support the pelvic organs, such as the bladder, uterus and bowel. They can become weak and sag because of little or no exercise, as part of aging or after having a baby.

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



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