

URINARY INCONTINENCE

Patient Information Fact Sheet

›What is urinary incontinence?

People of all ages can have difficulty controlling their bladders, whether they are school children or grandparents, men or women, otherwise healthy individuals or those with some disability. Some people find that they often need to go to the toilet more frequently during the day and night while others may experience regular accidents. The National Association for Continence estimates that urinary incontinence affects approximately 25 million adults in America.

›How can people tell if they have urinary incontinence?

Most people need to empty their bladders no more than seven times a day and only once a night. They can consciously control when and where this process takes place. People who have bladder problems are sometimes unable to control their bladders and release urine at the wrong time.

›Is there more than one type of urinary incontinence?

There are several different types of urinary incontinence:

- **Stress incontinence.** This is when the bladder leaks small amounts of urine as a result of stress. Confusingly the use of the word “stress” does not mean mental stress. It refers to the physical stress or pressure that sudden movements place on the muscles supporting the bladder. Such sudden movements include coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting or any sudden physical exercise.
- **Unstable bladder.** There are several symptoms of an unstable bladder. Some people need to go to the toilet frequently—more than seven times during the day and more than once at night. Others experience a very strong urge to go to the toilet with no advance warning. Sometimes this urge is so strong that they are unable to delay passing urine long enough to reach the toilet.
- **Mixed incontinence.** Individuals who suffer from both unstable bladder and stress incontinence are described as having mixed incontinence.
- **Overflow incontinence.** This type occurs when the bladder does not empty properly. As a result, over time, large quantities of urine are stored, causing the bladder to overflow. This type of incontinence is more common in men and is often the result of an enlarged prostate blocking the bladder opening.

›How is urinary incontinence treated?

A great deal can be done about bladder problems. Almost everybody with these problems can be helped and many people can be completely cured.

- **Exercise.** Sometimes something as simple as doing special exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, or retraining the bladder to hold on for longer, is all that is needed.
- **Medication.** Some drugs can relieve and control the troublesome symptoms of an unstable bladder. Your doctor may prescribe one of the following drugs: **mirabegron** (Myrbetriq), **oxybutynin** (Ditropan XL, Gelnique, Oxytrol), **solifenacin** (Vesicare), **tolterodine** (Detrol

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LA), **trospium** (Sanctura), **darifenacin** (Enablex), or **fesoterodine** (Toviaz). If your doctor thinks you have a urinary tract infection he or she may prescribe an antibiotic to treat it.

- **Surgery.** There are straightforward surgical procedures that have helped many people to control their bladder problems. These include operations to repair weakened muscles or remove any blockage from the bladder.
- **Special products.** If the underlying problem cannot be controlled, special products such as pants, pads, collection devices, chair and bed protection allow people manage their incontinence with minimal impact on their lives.

› **Self-help measures**

- Watch your weight; being overweight makes incontinence more likely.
- Women should practice pelvic floor exercises—particularly before and after having a baby.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and fiber to prevent constipation.
- Stop smoking; a chronic cough can cause incontinence.
- Don't drink too much liquid, although it is important to drink at least eight 8-oz glasses of water a day.
- Don't drink too much tea, coffee or alcohol. these drinks can make you pass more urine.

› **Further information**

National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse: www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov

National Association for Continence: www.nafc.org

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