

Urinary Incontinence: Do you have a bladder control problem?

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Urinary incontinence is the loss of bladder control that occurs when the pelvic muscles are either too weak, or too active. Incontinence can occur at any age, but it is a common problem with older adults. About 15% of men and 30% of women over age 65 experience urinary incontinence, and it affects over 13 million Americans. Weakness in the pelvic muscles can cause you to have accidents when you sneeze, cough, or laugh. This is known as stress incontinence. Bladder muscles that are too active can make you feel a strong urge to urinate even when you have little urine in the bladder. This type of incontinence is called urge incontinence or overactive bladder. While stress incontinence is most common, some people suffer from both types. Incontinence can have various causes. In men, prostate problems can produce incontinence. In women, the most common reason is a weakness in the pelvic muscles after childbirth.

Incontinence is bothersome and may cause you to limit your activities. Many people with urinary incontinence have feelings of embarrassment, and are reluctant to discuss it. If left untreated, it can lead to skin rashes and urinary tract infections. The good news is that 80% of urinary incontinence can be cured or improved. To start, tell your provider about your incontinence. Your provider may order tests of your urine or blood, or tests that measure how well you empty your bladder to help determine the cause. You may also be told to keep a bladder diary to record when you urinate and when you leak urine. For proper treatment, it is best to know what kind of incontinence you have.

There are several effective treatments for urinary incontinence including:

1. Pelvic muscle exercises, known as kegels, are a simple maneuver that involves squeezing and releasing the muscles that hold urine about 30-80 times daily. Be careful that you are not just flexing and releasing your abdominal muscles. Kegels are recommended to make your muscles stronger to hold urine in longer.
2. Another treatment, biofeedback uses sensors placed by a therapist, either inside or outside of your body, to help you become more aware of your pelvic floor muscles and regain control.
3. Other recommendations include weight loss if overweight, stopping smoking, alcohol avoidance, decreased caffeine, and avoidance of heavy lifting. Some people also find scheduled toileting helps.

References

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