

URINARY INCONTINENCE

Many women leak small amounts of urine at times. This can occur with certain movements, during pregnancy, or during other stress such as coughing. Some women lose urine when they hear the sound of water running or when their hands are in the water. Others find that they feel the urge to urinate and are not able to control it. When the loss of urine becomes frequent or severe enough to become a problem, it is called urinary incontinence. Urinary incontinence is more common in women than in men. It affects 25 percent of women under 65 and 30 percent of women older than 60. Women do not tend to tell their physicians about their problem and therefore live with wearing pads or having embarrassing situations occur. Urinary incontinence is not a normal part of aging and can be treated.

There are three types of incontinence:

- Urge incontinence
- Stress incontinence
- Overflow incontinence
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Urge incontinence occurs when the muscle wall of the bladder is overactive, leading to the loss of urine. Stress incontinence occurs when pressure on the bladder causes the loss of urine such as with coughing, laughing, sneezing, or physical activity. It is mainly caused by a weakness of the tissues that support the bladder and urethra. Overflow incontinence occurs when the bladder does not empty during regular voiding, and there is a steady leakage of small amounts of urine.

The causes of urinary incontinence may include infection, damage to organs due to childbirth and aging, and muscular disorders. A proper diagnosis may be obtained by seeing your physician for a thorough examination, including lab testing and special bladder testing called cystometrics. Keeping a voiding diary recording the time and amount of urine loss, may be of help in allowing your physician to make a proper diagnosis.

Treatment may include bladder retraining and bladder muscle exercises, known as *Kegel exercises*. These exercises involve squeezing the muscles you use to hold your urine, and repeating these several times a day. Some medications are indicated for treatment but may have side effects. Finally surgical treatment may be necessary for cases of significant stress incontinence. One such procedure is the *TVT*, or tension-free vaginal tape, which is an outpatient procedure with an 80 to 90% success rate. For more information please see the following website <http://www.controlsuddenurineloss.com>

More information on this common problem, its diagnosis, and treatment can be obtained at http://www.webmd.com/hw/female_incontinence/hw220316.asp