

Help for Bladder Control



Many people are inconvenienced and embarrassed by urinary incontinence—they leak urine when they laugh, cough, sneeze, or lift heavy objects.

Incontinence can be caused when muscles used to control the bladder weaken due to childbirth or prostate surgery. Neurological complications caused by injury or stroke, or neurologic disease (like multiple sclerosis) can also weaken bladder control. So can diabetes. But the most common cause of urinary incontinence in the older population is what doctors call urge incontinence or bladder instability: Frequent, involuntary bladder contractions release small amounts of urine.

If urinary incontinence is a problem for you, see a urologist, a doctor who specializes in problems and diseases of the urinary system. Medications, biofeedback bladder training, exercise, or surgery can improve or cure urinary incontinence.

To help manage urinary incontinence:

- Empty your bladder at least every 2 hours.
- Avoid highly spiced foods, which irritate the bladder. Avoid caffeine and alcohol at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- Practice Kegel exercises to improve bladder control. (These are also described in Tip Plan for a Healthier, Happier Menopause at www.HealthyLearn.com, Women's Health Problems.) To feel the muscles to be exercised, practice stopping the flow of urine.

Then practice the following three exercises.

- Squeeze these muscles for 3 seconds, then relax the muscles for 3 seconds. Do this ten times, three times a day.
- Squeeze and relax the muscles as quickly as possible. Repeat ten times, three times a day.
- For women only: Imagine pulling up a tampon in the vagina. Hold for 3 seconds. Then bear down as if having a bowel movement, holding for 3 seconds.
- If you wear sanitary pads or incontinence pads, change them often to prevent odor and infection.