

Urinary Incontinence in Women

Eat a variety of foods

Many people lose control of their bladders at some point during their lives. There are 2 major types of bladder control problems, stress incontinence and urge incontinence. **Stress incontinence** means that people leak urine when they sneeze or cough. **Urge incontinence** is a sudden and overwhelming need to urinate. This often happens at times you can predict, such as when you open the door to your house or when you hear water running.

The tips below can help with both types of incontinence. For the best results, it's important to combine Kegel exercises and Bladder Training, in addition to making any needed lifestyle changes. Be patient— you might not see any difference for several weeks. For some people, it can take up to 3 months to tell if these are working.

Lifestyle changes

- Lose weight if you're overweight.
- If you smoke, stop!
- Stay away from foods that can irritate your bladder:
 - Caffeine (found in coffee, tea, soda)
 - Artificial sweeteners (such as diet soda)
 - Alcohol
 - Fruit and fruit juice high in acid (such as grapefruit, orange juice)
- Make sure to drink enough water - at least four 8-ounce glasses of water per day. It might not seem to make sense but, if you don't drink enough, your bladder shrinks and can't hold very much at one time. At first your symptoms will get worse, but they will improve as your bladder slowly gets larger and gets used to the larger volume.
- Keep from getting constipated. The best way to do this is to exercise most days of the week, drink plenty of liquids, and add fiber-rich foods to your diet or take a fiber supplement.

Other tips

- Some medicines can make urinary incontinence worse. These include anticholinergics, antihistamines, diuretics, alpha-blockers, oral estrogen, as well as some others. Make sure we've talked about whether any of your prescription medicines might be making your symptoms worse. Remember to also look at any over-the-counter medicines you take.
- If you have urge incontinence, look for physical barriers that keep you from going to the bathroom easily. Some things to consider include wearing clothing that's easy to get off, wearing a nightgown instead of pajamas at night, making sure you have a clear path to the bathroom, and using a nightlight so you can see well if you get up during the night.
- Just to be on the safe side, you might decide to use a pad or other incontinence products while you are working on these ideas.

Kegel exercises

Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor, which are the ones you use to stop and release the flow of urine. You do these exercises by squeezing and releasing the pelvic floor muscles several times a day. Be sure you're using your pelvic floor muscles to do these exercises, not clenching or tightening your buttocks. To find the right muscles, tighten the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. You know you have the right muscles when you feel a lift in your pelvic floor.

I recommend that you do 10 slow contractions by squeezing your pelvic floor. Hold each contraction for 6 seconds. Do these 3 times a day 3 days a week. At first it might be hard to hold these muscles tight for that long, or to repeat the exercise this many times. But the more you practice, and the longer you hold each contraction, the easier it will get and the better your muscles will work.

To help you remember, do your Kegel exercises with something you do every day, like brushing your teeth, stopping at a stop light, or during commercials while watching TV. Remember to be patient – it will probably take weeks before you notice any change!

Bladder training

The goal of bladder training is to resist the urge to urinate for a certain length of time, eventually going 2 to 4 hours without having to urinate. Start by recording how often you urinate for a few days. Use that to set a schedule for how often you will go to the bathroom. Every week try to add 5 minutes to the amount of time you can go without having to urinate. If you feel the urge to urinate before your scheduled time, try to resist it by doing the following:

- Stop and stay still. Sit down if you can.
- Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles quickly 3 to 5 times and repeat as needed.
- Relax the rest of your body.
- Concentrate on suppressing the urge.
- Distract yourself. Get your mind on something else.
- Wait until your next scheduled time before going to the bathroom.

What about medicine?

Medicines to control bladder incontinence often don't help much and can cause some unwanted side effects. It is better to avoid medicines if possible by first making the changes listed above. For most people, these things usually work much better than medicine.

What if the techniques don't seem to be working?

If you've been using these techniques on a regular basis for a few months and they're not helping you to control your urine, let me know. We can go over the lifestyle changes you've made, be sure you're doing your Kegel exercises correctly, and then talk more about the option for medicine.

Call my office if you have these symptoms

Be sure to contact me sooner and not wait a few months if:

- You notice that you're dribbling only small amounts of urine and cannot empty your bladder completely.
- You notice pain in your bladder or pain when you urinate.
- If there is any blood in your urine.