



Urinary Incontinence in Women

If you leak urine accidentally, you may have a condition called urinary incontinence (UI).

If you have UI, you're not alone. Many women have this condition at some point in life. It can occur during or after pregnancy, or if you gain weight, or due to aging.

UI can affect your quality of life. You might:

- Avoid doing activities you enjoy and sexual intimacy if you feel embarrassed or self-conscious.

- Have problems sleeping due to getting up often to urinate.
 - Slip and fall while hurrying to get to the bathroom.
- You can manage or even cure UI with Kegel exercises and other self-care methods. If needed, your doctor can recommend medications and other treatment.

Causes and Symptoms

The 2 main types of UI are stress and urge incontinence (overactive bladder). Each type has different causes and symptoms.

Stress incontinence

With this type of UI, urine leakage can occur:

- When there's sudden pressure on the bladder and the urethra doesn't close completely.
- During exercising, coughing, laughing, or sneezing.

Urge incontinence (overactive bladder)

When the bladder is irritated, it may contract suddenly and unexpectedly. This can cause urine leakage due to being unable to:

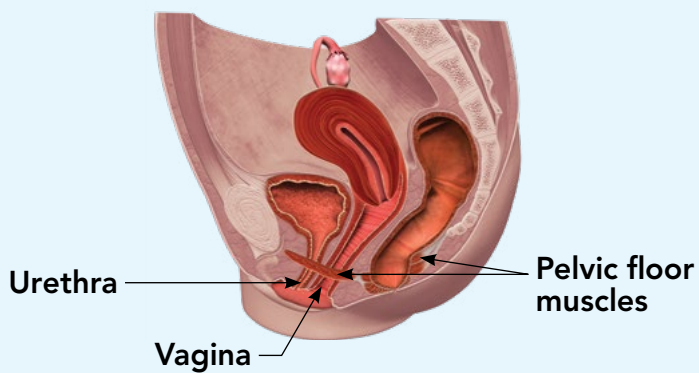
- Control urination in time. This can happen whether or not your bladder is full.
- Get to a bathroom in time.

UI can also be caused by:

- Urinary tract infection or constipation. When the cause is treated, UI goes away.
- Neurologic conditions related to stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, nerve damage, or dementia.
- Pelvic area surgery, trauma, or radiation treatment.

Diagnosis

Contact your doctor if UI is affecting your usual activities. Your doctor will ask about symptoms and what's happening before you leak urine. If possible, keep notes on your symptoms and possible triggers. Bring the notes to your appointment.



Home Care

Many women can manage or cure UI with Kegel exercises and other self-care methods.

► **Kegel exercises.** Kegels strengthen the muscles that control urine flow. They can also signal the bladder to relax, and can improve your enjoyment of sex. It may take 6 or more weeks of regular Kegels to get full benefits. Kegels take practice and patience. Start with feeling and activating your pelvic floor muscles.

- Place a hand on your perineum (the area between your vagina and anus). You can feel your perineum lift up as you squeeze your pelvic floor muscles.
- Place a finger inside your vagina and tighten the muscles around your finger.
- Let your stomach, inner thighs, and buttocks remain relaxed.
- Squeeze and hold the Kegel for 3 seconds, then relax for 3 seconds. Repeat 10 times (for 1 set).
- Do 3 or more sets daily.

You can do Kegels anywhere and anytime. No one else will know.

Doctors don't recommend doing Kegels while on the toilet. It can make it difficult to empty your bladder.

► **Bladder training.** Learning to relax your bladder is useful if you have urge incontinence. Set up a regular schedule for urinating. Go to the bathroom whether or not you feel the urge. Gradually increase time between urination.

► **Double voiding.** Some women feel a strong need to urinate again right after urinating. Or they lose a few drops of urine after getting off the toilet (postvoid dribbling). To avoid these problems, follow these steps:

1. Relax while urinating.
2. Stand up and count to 10.
3. Sit on the toilet again for a moment to release additional drops of urine.

Lifestyle Recommendations

► **Avoid foods or drinks that irritate the bladder.**

Irritation can trigger an urge to urinate, or cause sudden bladder contractions, even when your bladder isn't full. Think back on what you ate or drank 2 to 3 hours ago. Stop these items and see if it helps.

► **Lose weight (if needed).** Studies show that if you're overweight, losing just 5 to 10 percent of body weight can significantly improve UI.

► **Quit smoking.** Tobacco products have chemicals that can irritate the bladder and cause coughing. Both can cause UI.

► **Wear absorbent pads or briefs.** Use these during activities that cause you to leak urine.

► **Don't overdo fluids.** If you eat regular meals, you only need 2 to 3 glasses of fluid daily. It's OK to drink when you're thirsty.

Medical Treatment

If needed to manage your UI, your doctor can recommend medications, a pessary (device to support the urethra), or surgery. They can help you find the best option for you.

When to Call Us

Call the Advice or Appointment Call Center at 1-866-454-8855 or make a doctor's appointment if:

- Self-care hasn't improved your symptoms.
- You urinate often but pass only small amounts.
- You feel burning or pain while urinating.
- Your urine looks bloody.