



*Don't be embarrassed. Take charge and work with your doctor to treat any underlying condition that may be causing loss of bladder control.*

If you have trouble controlling your bladder (urinary incontinence), you are not alone. Many people are coping with this problem.

In many cases, incontinence can be controlled, if not cured outright. Temporary incontinence can be caused by water pills (diuretics) and other common medications. Other causes include:

- constipation
- urinary infections
- stones in the urinary tract
- extended bed rest
- surgery
- trauma
- radiation
- perimenopausal changes
- infection/disease
- neurological changes
- obesity
- childbearing
- hysterectomy

Curing the underlying problem can often cure the incontinence. There are three types of persistent or chronic loss of bladder control:

1. **Stress incontinence** refers to small amounts of urine leaking out during exercise, coughing, laughing, sneezing, or other movements that squeeze the bladder. Women are more likely to have stress incontinence. Kegel exercises often improve this condition.

## Kegel exercises

Kegel exercises can help cure or improve stress incontinence by strengthening the muscles that control the flow of urine.

- Locate the muscles by repeatedly stopping your urine in midstream and starting again. The muscles that you feel squeezing around your urethra and anus are the ones to focus on.
- Practice squeezing these muscles while you are not urinating. If your stomach, leg, or buttocks move, you are not using the right muscles.
- Hold the squeeze for three seconds, and then relax for three seconds.
- Repeat the exercise 10 to 15 times per session.
- Do at least three Kegel exercise sessions a day.

Kegel exercises are simple and effective. You can do them anywhere and anytime. No one will know you are doing them except you.

2. **Urge incontinence**, or overactive bladder, happens when the need to urinate comes on so quickly that you don't have enough time to get to the toilet. Some causes include bladder infection, an enlarged prostate, tumors that press on the bladder, Parkinson's disease, and nerve-related disorders, such as multiple sclerosis or stroke.
3. **Overflow incontinence** is when the bladder cannot empty itself completely.

## Home treatment

- Don't be embarrassed. Take charge and work with your doctor to treat any underlying conditions that may be causing loss of bladder control.
- Don't let incontinence keep you from doing the things you like to do. You can find absorbent pads or briefs, such as *Attends* and *Depends*, in pharmacies and supermarkets.
- Avoid coffee, tea, and other drinks that contain caffeine, which overstimulate the bladder. Do not cut down on overall fluids; they help keep the rest of your body healthy.
- Practice "double-voiding." Empty your bladder as much as possible, relax for a minute, and then try to empty it again.

- Urinate on a schedule, perhaps every three to four hours during the day, whether or not you feel the urge.
- Prevent rashes by keeping the skin in the genital area dry. Vaseline or Desitin ointment may help.
- Pay attention to your medications, including over-the-counter drugs. Some can affect bladder control.
- Incontinence can be caused by a urinary tract infection. If you feel pain or burning when you urinate, try home treatment for urinary tract infections.
- If you smoke or use tobacco products, consider getting help to quit. This may reduce your coughing, which may in turn reduce stress incontinence.
- If you are overweight, talk to your doctor about starting a weight management program that includes physical activity and healthy eating. Losing weight will reduce the pressure on your bladder.
- Wear clothing that you can take off quickly, such as pants with elastic waistbands.
- Clear a path from your bed to the bathroom, or consider placing a portable commode by your bed.

## Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- you suddenly lose control of your bladder
- you are peeing frequently, but only passing small amounts of urine
- your bladder feels full even after you urinate
- you have difficulty peeing when your bladder feels full
- you feel burning or pain while urinating
- your urine looks bloody
- your urine smells funny

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org). Here you'll find the Health encyclopedia, which offers more in-depth information on this and many other topics.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.