

Urinary Incontinence



Don't let incontinence embarrass you.

Take charge and work with your doctor to treat any underlying condition that may be causing the problem.



If you suffer from urinary incontinence (loss of bladder control), you are not alone. Many people are coping with this problem.

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

- constipation
- urinary infections
- stones in the urinary tract
- extended bed rest
- surgery
- trauma
- radiation
- perimenopausal changes
- infection/disease processes
- 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. It is most often seen in women.

This kind of incontinence is often helped by Kegel exercises.

Kegel exercises

Kegel exercises can help cure or improve stress incontinence. These exercises strengthen 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, then relax for three seconds.
- Repeat the exercise 10 to 15 times per session.
- Do at least three Kegel exercise sessions per 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 there is not enough time to get to the toilet. Some possible causes include bladder infection, prostate enlargement, tumors that press on the bladder, Parkinson’s disease, and nerve-related disorders, such as multiple sclerosis or stroke.
3. **Overflow incontinence** occurs when the bladder cannot empty itself completely.

Home treatment

- Don’t let incontinence embarrass you. Take charge and work with your doctor to treat any underlying conditions that may be causing the problem.
- Don’t let incontinence keep you from doing the things you like to do. Absorbent pads or briefs, such as *Attends* and *Depends*, are available in pharmacies and supermarkets.
- Avoid coffee, tea, and other drinks that contain caffeine, which overstimulate the bladder. Do not cut down on overall fluids. You need these to 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 your bladder again.

- Urinate on a schedule, perhaps every three to four hours during the day, whether the urge is there or not. This may help you to restore control.
- Keep skin in the genital area dry to prevent rashes. Vaseline or Desitin ointment may help.
- Pay special attention to any medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs, since some affect bladder control.
- Incontinence is sometimes caused by a urinary tract infection. If you feel pain or burning when you urinate, seek home treatment for urinary tract infections.
- If you smoke or use other tobacco products, consider getting help to quit. This may reduce your coughing, which may in turn reduce your problem with incontinence.
- If you are overweight, talk to your doctor about starting on a weight management program that includes physical activity and healthy eating. Losing weight will help reduce the pressure on your bladder.
- Wear clothing that can be removed 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 become incontinent
- you are urinating frequently, but only passing small amounts or urine
- your bladder feels full even after you urinate
- you have difficulty urinating when your bladder feels full
- you feel burning or pain while urinating
- your urine looks bloody
- your urine has an unusual odor

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at members.kp.org. Here you'll find the Health encyclopedia, which offers more in-depth information on this and many other topics.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- 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 medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.