

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT URINARY INCONTINENCE IN WOMEN

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What Is Urinary Incontinence?

Urinary incontinence (UI) is when you have trouble controlling your bladder and the flow of urine. Although UI can affect women and men of all ages, this summary focuses on UI in women. Although it is more common in older women, UI is not an inevitable part of aging.

Many women find UI embarrassing and do not report it to their doctors. But you don't have to live with this problem; many options are available to treat it. Not treating UI is associated with decreased quality of life.

What Are the Symptoms?

The most common types of UI and related symptoms include:

Stress incontinence involves leaking urine when sneezing, coughing, laughing, or doing other physical activity that puts pressure on your bladder

Urge incontinence

- Feeling a sudden need to urinate and leaking urine before you get to the toilet
- Feeling a need to urinate frequently
- Going to the bathroom more than usual

Mixed incontinence is a mix of the above symptoms

What Are the Causes?

UI can be caused by:

- Childbirth or hysterectomy, which can weaken or damage the muscles that support your bladder
- Other pelvic conditions
- Hormonal changes
- Chronic medical conditions, like asthma and diabetes
- Certain medications
- Carrying excess weight, which puts pressure on your bladder and surrounding muscles

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Before your appointment, it might be helpful to keep a daily diary of symptoms, including when they occur, how much fluid you drink and when, and how often you use the bathroom.
- Your doctor will ask about your medical history. You may be asked to complete a questionnaire about your symptoms.
- You will have a physical examination. This may include a pelvic examination.
- You will provide a urine sample for testing.



- You may have a test that measures how much urine is left in your bladder after you use the bathroom.

How Is It Treated?

You do not have to live with UI. Have a conversation with your doctor about your goals for treatment, and discuss your personal preferences along with the cost, benefit, and side effects of the available treatment options.

Review your medications with your doctor to see if any changes to them will improve your symptoms.

For stress, urge, and mixed UI, try the following lifestyle and behavioral changes for 4 to 6 weeks:

- Daily contraction and relaxation of pelvic floor muscles (Kegel exercises)
- Alter your fluid intake (try sipping fluid throughout the day rather than drinking large quantities at one time)
- Make sure you use the restroom every 2 to 3 hours while awake
- If you are overweight or obese, a modest amount of weight loss (8%) can improve symptoms

If these lifestyle and behavioral changes do not improve your symptoms, ask your doctor about other potential treatments. Medications are available that may help with urge and mixed incontinence. Minimally invasive and surgical options are also available and vary depending on the type of UI you have.

Questions for My Doctor

- How do I do pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises?
- What options do I have for treatment?
- What are the side effects and costs of the medication you are recommending?
- Are there any minimally invasive treatments I should consider?
- Should I see a specialist?
- Should I have surgery?

For More Information



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Kegel Instructions From the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/urologic-diseases/kegel-exercises

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/urinaryincontinence.html>

Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health

www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/urinary-incontinence