

Do you have loss of bladder control?

If you lose urine from your bladder at times when you do not want to, you have loss of bladder control. This is called incontinence (in-kon-tuh-nents). The urine loss can range from a small leak to a large wetting. Loss of bladder control is a common problem. It affects one in three persons age 65 and older. Half of all women have wetting or leakage at some time in their lives. Often this loss of control can be treated, so be sure to mention it to your doctor.

What causes bladder control problems?

There are many things that may cause loss of bladder control. As you get older, you may have trouble getting to the toilet on time. Just because loss of bladder control is more common in older people does not mean that it is a normal part of aging. Loss of bladder control can be caused or made worse by infections, hormone changes, constipation, many diseases and pregnancy. Some medications also can cause or worsen the problem.

What are some of the bladder control problems?

Stress incontinence happens when urine leaks from the bladder due to strain or pressure on the bladder. Strain on the bladder may happen when you cough, sneeze, exercise or lift heavy objects. Stress incontinence is more common in women. Special exercises, medicines and sometimes surgery can help.

Urge incontinence happens when the urge to urinate is so strong that it is not possible to get to the toilet on time. Urge incontinence is common in older people. Overflow incontinence happens when small amounts of urine leak from a bladder that does not empty well. Men with large prostate glands may have this problem. Also people with diabetes or multiple sclerosis may have overflow incontinence.

One or more of these problems may happen at the same time.

What can you do about bladder problems?

Talk to your doctor.

- Many people feel ashamed and do not like to talk about their bladder problems. If you have bladder problems, you should talk with your doctor. The first step in treating bladder problems is to see your doctor for a medical check-up.
- You should also bring your medicines to show your doctor. Some medicines (either prescription or over-the-counter) can make bladder problems worse. There are other medicines that can help these problems. Estrogen hormone treatment may be used for older women. Other medicine may help shrink the size of a large prostate gland in men.

Stress incontinence

- If you have stress incontinence, pelvic muscle exercises may help stop leaking of urine. To do these exercises, while sitting on the toilet, try to squeeze the muscles that stop the flow of urine. If you can do it, you are using the right muscles. You should squeeze these muscles for a count of 3, relax, and then repeat. Try to do this 10-15 times at least three times a day.

Urge incontinence

- If you have urge incontinence, your doctor may suggest bladder training. This means that you try to urinate on a schedule. Start by making frequent trips to the toilet (maybe every half hour). As you gain more control, make less frequent trips to the toilet (every hour).

Overflow incontinence

- If you have overflow incontinence, your doctor may suggest medication or surgery. Exercises and bladder training do not work very well to fix this problem.

Other tips

- You may find that simple lifestyle changes can help with bladder control.
- Cut down on alcohol and caffeine (drinks like coffee, tea, or cola, and chocolate).
- Keep a potty chair close to the bed at night.
- Empty your bladder at least every two hours during the day, even before you feel the need.

Remember...

You do not have to live with loss of bladder control. Talk with your doctor to see what you can do to gain control.

WHAT YOUR DOCTOR NEEDS TO KNOW

- I take these prescription medicines:

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- I take these over-the-counter medicines (such as Tylenol, aspirin, or Maalox):

- I started having bladder trouble _____ recently _____ 1 to 2 years ago _____ years ago

- Number of babies I have had: _____
Birthdates: _____

- My periods stopped (menopause) _____ months ago or _____ years ago.

- I recently had this operation: _____

Date: _____

- I recently had a bladder (urinary tract) infection: _____ yes _____ no

Date: _____

- I am often constipated. _____ yes _____ no

- I have pain or burning feelings when I pass urine. _____ yes _____ no

- I often have a really strong urge to go to the toilet right away. _____ yes _____ no

- Sometimes my bladder feels full, even after I go to the toilet. _____ yes _____ no

- I go to the toilet often, but very little urine comes out. _____ yes _____ no

- I don't go out with friends or family because I worry about leaking urine. _____ yes _____ no

- I smoke cigarettes. _____ yes _____ no

- I have (or had) these problems:

☐ cancer ☐ constipation
☐ crippling arthritis ☐ diabetes
☐ depression ☐ multiple sclerosis
☐ spinal cord injury ☐ stroke
☐ urine infection ☐ other: _____

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