



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Bladder and Urine Control

Problems with bladder and urine control can affect lifestyle, self esteem and relationships. Although weak bladder and urine control is very common, especially among older women, it can be improved and well managed. Regular exercises, medicines and sometimes surgery can help bladder and urine control.

Signs and symptoms

Signs of poor or weak bladder and urine control include:

- Urinary incontinence – involuntary or unintentional loss of urine from the bladder
- Frequency – wanting to go to the toilet often
- Nocturia – waking up to go to the toilet more than twice at night
- Urgency – sudden urges to go to the toilet.

Complications of urinary incontinence include infection, skin problems, sleep loss, the discomfort and odour of wetness and the need to use 'incontinence aids'.

Who is at risk?

Poor bladder and urine control can happen to any one at any age, but factors that increase the risks include:

- Menopause
- Pregnancy, childbirth and having borne children
- Being overweight
- Urinary tract infections
- Constipation
- Some medical conditions (e.g., prostate disease, dementia, diabetes, stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease)
- Certain types of surgery (e.g., prostatectomy, hysterectomy)
- Chronic cough – may be associated with smoking or respiratory conditions
- Poor mobility.

Caffeine drinks, alcohol and some medicines can worsen bladder and urine problems. Some medicines can cause bladder and urine problems. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

Important

With proper assessment and treatment, urinary incontinence and bladder problems can sometimes be cured, often improved and always made more manageable. Ask a doctor, pharmacist, physiotherapist or continence adviser for help.

Types of incontinence

There are different types of urinary incontinence with different causes and treatments.

Urge

Urge incontinence is the inability to hold urine long enough to reach a toilet. It is caused by overactive or unstable contractions of the bladder muscles that cause a sudden, strong urge to urinate.

Stress

Stress incontinence is involuntary urine leakage during activities that increase abdominal pressure (e.g., coughing, sneezing, exercise, laughing, lifting). It is often due to weak pelvic floor muscles (the muscles that support the bladder).

Overflow

Overflow incontinence is a small leak of urine associated with an overfull bladder. Urine leakage occurs at inappropriate times because the bladder does not empty properly at appropriate times.

Reflex

Reflex incontinence is the loss of large volumes of urine without the usual sensation to void. It results from damage to the nerves controlling the bladder. The most common cause is spinal cord damage.

Functional

Functional incontinence occurs when a person does not recognise the need to go to the toilet, does not recognise where the toilet is, cannot physically get to the toilet in time or is unable or unwilling to use the toilet.

Treatment and management

Treatment can often greatly improve bladder and urine control. Treatment options include pelvic floor muscle exercises, bladder retraining, medicines and, in some cases, surgery. Incontinence is a complex condition and it is important to get help from a doctor, physiotherapist or continence adviser.

Special 'incontinence aids' are available to help manage bladder and urine control problems. They include:

- Absorbent pads, pants, bed sheets and chair covers to manage urine leakage and odour
- Urinals, bedpans, commodes, raised toilet seats and hand rails to help with toileting.

A number of funding schemes help subsidise the cost of incontinence aids. Pharmacists and the Continence Foundation of Australia can advise on incontinence aids.

Self care

A healthy diet and lifestyle can help to prevent and manage poor bladder and urine control. Be positive and remember that treatments and lifestyle changes may take time to work.

- Do pelvic floor muscle exercises daily and correctly to strengthen the muscles that support the bladder – a physiotherapist can advise.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise).
- Limit caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks). Caffeine can irritate your bladder.
- Limit alcohol – it can irritate your bladder.
- Keep to a healthy weight.
- Eat regular, healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Don't smoke – coughing can weaken pelvic floor muscles.
- Avoid constipation.
- Consult a doctor promptly about urinary tract infections.
- Avoid heavy lifting and carrying.
- Resist going to the toilet 'just in case'. This can lead to the bladder sending 'visit the toilet' signals too often.
- When using the toilet, sit down properly with your feet firmly supported. This helps to fully relax your pelvic floor and sphincter muscles.
- Use good quality disposable liners, pads or pants to keep you clean, dry and odour-free. Barrier creams and talcum powder applied to the skin can reduce pad absorbency and are not recommended.

Related fact cards

- *Constipation*
- *Coughs*
- *Menopause*
- *Pelvic Floor Exercises*
- *Prostate Problems*
- *Urinary Tract Infections*
- *Weight and Health*

For more information

A physiotherapist – contact the Australian Physiotherapy Association, listed in the white pages of the phone book or website www.physiotherapy.asn.au

Bladder & Bowel Website – website bladderbowel.gov.au

Continence Foundation of Australia – phone 1800 33 00 66 or website www.continence.org.au

National Public Toilet Map – website www.toiletmap.gov.au

TENA Bladder Weakness Products – for assistance with product selection, and a free sample phone 1800 623 347 or website www.tena.com.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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