

# 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 accidental loss of urine from the bladder
- Frequency – wanting to urinate too often
- Nocturia – waking up to urinate more than twice at night
- Urgency – sudden urges to urinate.

Urinary incontinence can lead to infection, skin problems, sleep loss, embarrassment, the discomfort and odour of wetness and the need to use ‘incontinence aids’.

## Important

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

## 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)
- Constant 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.

## Types of incontinence

There are different types of urinary incontinence with different causes and treatments. Common types include urge, stress, overflow and functional incontinence.

### Urge

Urge incontinence is a sudden strong urge to urinate, followed by a leak of moderate to large amounts of urine before reaching a toilet. It is most commonly due to overactive or unstable bladder muscles. People with urge incontinence may have to visit the toilet very frequently. Causes include stroke, bladder infection, some medical conditions and some medicines

### Stress

Stress incontinence is a small leak of urine 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 from a bladder that is too full because it has not emptied properly. The urine leak may be an occasional or a constant dribble. Causes include prostate problems, constipation and problems with the nerves controlling the bladder.

### Functional

Functional incontinence is a leak of urine for 'non-bladder' reasons. It 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, prescription 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.

Some people are eligible for a government subsidy to help reduce 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. Remember that treatments and lifestyle changes may take time to work.

- Do pelvic floor muscle exercises every day to strengthen the muscles supporting the bladder. Learn the correct technique.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises not to). This helps to improve bladder capacity.
- Limit caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks). It 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.
- Don't smoke. Coughing can weaken pelvic floor muscles.
- Avoid constipation.
- Do not rush when urinating. Women should sit down properly on the toilet, with feet firmly supported.
- Resist going to the toilet 'just in case'. This can lead to the bladder sending 'visit the toilet' signals too often.
- Avoid heavy lifting and carrying.
- Consult a doctor promptly about urinary tract infections.
- Use good quality disposable liners, pads or pants to keep you clean, dry and odour-free. If you use barrier cream or talcum powder, use only a small amount, as they can reduce urinary pad absorbency.

## For more information

### **Bladder & Bowel Website**

Website: [www.bladderbowel.gov.au](http://www.bladderbowel.gov.au)

### **Continence Foundation of Australia**

Phone: 1800 33 00 66

Website: [www.continence.org.au](http://www.continence.org.au)

### **Independent Living**

#### **Centres Australia**

Phone: 1300 885 886

Website: [www.ilcaustralia.org](http://www.ilcaustralia.org)

### **National Public Toilet Map**

Website: [www.toiletmap.gov.au](http://www.toiletmap.gov.au)

### **TENA Bladder Weakness Products**

For assistance with product selection,  
and a free sample phone 1800 623 347

Website: [www.tena.com.au](http://www.tena.com.au)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on  
CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS)**

#### **Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26  
from anywhere in Australia.

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

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: