



## Losing Bladder Control

Urinary incontinence is the loss of bladder control that can affect anyone, but is more common in older people. Symptoms can range from mild leaking to uncontrollable wetting. Women are more likely than men to have incontinence. In Singapore, the prevalence rate for female and male urinary incontinence was 11.8% and 4.3% respectively in 1998.

In most cases, urinary incontinence can be treated and controlled, if not cured.

### Causes Of Urinary Incontinence

Urinary incontinence can be caused by many reasons. These include urinary tract infections, vaginal infection or irritation, constipation and certain medicines, which can cause temporary incontinence. Sometimes, incontinence can last longer, which might be due to problems such as:

- Weak bladder muscles
- Overactive bladder muscles
- Urethra blockage due to an enlarged prostate
- Weakened pelvic floor muscles
- Diseases and disorders involving nerves and/or muscles that control the bladder

## Types Of Urinary Incontinence

### Stress incontinence

You experience a leakage of urine upon physical exertion. It can happen during exercise, coughing, sneezing, laughing or lifting heavy objects. This may be due to poor bladder support or a weak or damaged sphincter. It is the most common type of incontinence affecting younger and middle-aged women.

### Urge incontinence

You feel a strong desire to empty the bladder but are unable to get to the toilet in time.

### Overflow incontinence

You experience small amounts of urine leak from a bladder that is always full. This happens when there is weakness in bladder muscle or when a blocked urethra prevents normal emptying of the bladder. Diabetes and spinal cord injury can also cause this type of incontinence.

### Reflex incontinence

This occurs when there is urine loss without awareness, usually due to neurological disorders such as paraplegia.

### Total incontinence

In this case, there is complete loss of bladder control (continuous urine leakage), usually due to congenital abnormalities or post-surgical situations.

## Diagnosis Of Urinary Incontinence

To determine if you are suffering from urinary incontinence, your doctor may proceed to do one or more of the following tests:

### Urinalysis

A sample of your urine will be tested for the presence of infection, blood or other abnormalities.

### Residual urine measurement

This test is performed to see whether any urine remains after you have attempted to empty your bladder.

### Stress test

While your bladder is full, you may be asked to cough, stand and do other activities to find out whether these stresses on the bladder cause leakage.

### Ultrasound

This technique can be used to determine the size and shape of the kidneys, bladder, and prostate.

### Cystoscopy

A thin telescope-like instrument called a cystoscope is inserted into the bladder through the urethra. This test allows the physician to visualise the inside of the bladder to check for problems.

### Urodynamic testing

Urodynamic tests examine bladder and sphincter muscle function.

## Treatment For Urinary Incontinence

There are several types of treatment available for urinary incontinence. A qualified specialist can recommend the treatment that is best for your condition.

### Behavioral therapy

Special exercises and training programmes are effective in improving bladder control. These exercises to strengthen the sphincter muscles must be done correctly and faithfully to regain and maintain continence.

Pelvic muscle exercises (also known as Kegel exercises) are designed to help strengthen weak pelvic muscles around the bladder. These exercises are easy to do and they can lessen or cure stress and urge incontinence.

Bladder retraining (gradually prolonging the time between visits to the toilet), along with reasonable fluid intake, has helped many people overcome urinary incontinence.

### Medication

Medication can be prescribed to relax the bladder or tighten the sphincter muscles. Review your medication needs with your doctor to see what is best suited for your condition.

### Surgery

There are several types of surgery that can alleviate incontinence. In men, an operation may be required to relieve the blockage caused by an enlarged prostate. In women, an operation may be required to restore the support of the pelvic floor muscles or to reconstruct or compress the sphincter. An artificial urinary sphincter may be useful if the sphincter muscle is absent or has been severely damaged, or for patients whose condition is not cured with simpler treatments.

### Other options

Certain bulking agents like collagen can be injected around the urethra to add bulk to that area. These serve to compress the urethra and thereby increase resistance to urine flow.

### Absorbent products and devices

For people who are currently participating in a treatment programme or whose urinary incontinence cannot be cured, there are many absorbent products and devices that are available for wear.

**For more information on urinary incontinence or for an appointment, please contact our Urology Centre at 6772 5087.**