



# Urinary Incontinence



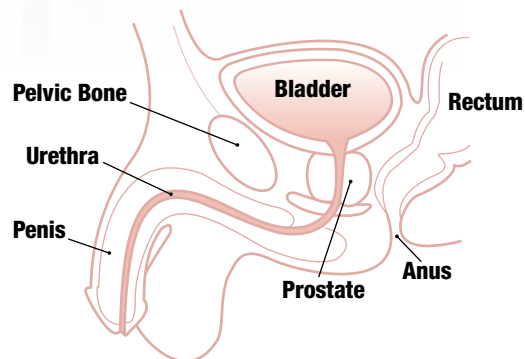
Few things are more distressing than incontinence. It affects up to 30% of women and 20% of men over 60—some 13 million Americans in all. Many hide the problem because of embarrassment and shame. But since treatment can often control incontinence, it's best to talk with your doctor.

## Your Bladder

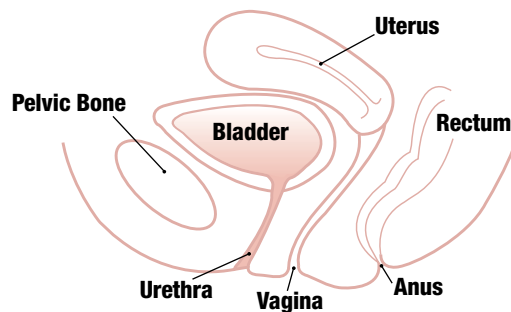
Your bladder is a hollow organ that expands to hold urine coming from your kidneys. As the amount of urine approaches the average bladder's 16-ounce capacity, you'll feel the need to void. When the time is convenient, your nervous system activates 2 key muscle groups. The muscle in the bladder wall contracts, and the muscles at the bladder outlet relax, allowing urine to pass.

For good urinary control, the bladder wall muscle can't contract too soon, and the outlet muscles can't be weak. The tissues at the base of the bladder must also support the organ properly. In men, the prostate can't pinch the flow of urine. To top it off, you also need a nervous system that functions properly.

## The Male Bladder



## The Female Bladder





*For some people, eliminating excess fluid intake is all it takes to control incontinence.*

## Why Does Urine Leak?

Here are some common types of incontinence:

**Urge incontinence (“overactive bladder”).** This type is most common in older adults and is caused by sudden contractions of the bladder wall muscle before the bladder is full. People feel an uncontrollable urge to void, often resulting in a small leak of urine before they can get to a bathroom.

**Stress incontinence.** The problem here is weakness of the tissues that support the bladder and/or the outlet muscles, usually in women who have had many children or men who have had prostate surgery. A cough, a sneeze, or exercise increases pressure on the bladder, forcing urine out.

**Mixed incontinence.** This type represents a combination of stress and urge problems. It occurs most often in older women and can produce a large amount of leakage.

**Overflow incontinence.** The bladder fills beyond its normal capacity due to an enlarged prostate or some other problem, which prevents normal emptying. This type is most common in older men. Symptoms include dribbling and frequent voiding of small amounts.

**Other causes.** Urinary tract or vaginal infections, constipation that leads to impacted stool, and certain medications, including many over-the-counter cold remedies, can also cause incontinence. Dementia and other neurological problems can impair urinary control. And some people are just not able to get to the bathroom fast enough.

## Diagnosis

Your doctor will start by reviewing your symptoms and may ask you to keep a diary of when you urinate. A pelvic exam is important for women, as is a prostate exam for men. Your urine will be checked for infection. You also may have blood tests to assess your kidney function and general health. Tests that measure bladder pressure, urine flow, and bladder emptying may also be helpful. You may need additional tests, especially if your doctor suspects neurological problems.





## Treatment

Therapy is tailored to your type of incontinence. Here are some options:



- **Kegel exercises.** Because they strengthen the bladder outlet and support muscles. Kegels are the place to start for urge and stress incontinence. To “squeeze for relief,” practice tightening your pelvic muscles by interrupting (over and over again) the flow of urine or rectal gas. Ask your doctor about detailed instructions on how to perform these exercises.

- **Bladder training.** This involves learning to resist the urge to urinate, which lengthens the time between trips to the bathroom. It may also involve scheduled toileting to help prevent leaks.

- **Avoiding caffeine and alcohol.** They are diuretics, which promote excretion of water. Also, restricting fluids during the evening hours can slow urine buildup.

- **Anticholinergic drugs.** They slow contractions of the bladder wall muscle and can be very helpful for urge and stress incontinence.

- **Other drugs for men.** Men with overflow incontinence due to prostate enlargement often benefit from drugs that relax the outlet muscles or those that shrink the gland. Various surgical treatments are also available.

- **A device for women.** For women whose problem is caused by a sagging (prolapsed) uterus, a firm rubber ring that supports the bottom of the uterus may help. This device, called a pessary, is inserted in the vagina by a physician and worn continuously.

- **Surgery.** This may be very helpful if behavioral and medical treatments fail, and doctors identify an anatomical cause for incontinence.



## Living With Your Bladder

Although pads or adult diapers can offer security, they should not be the first or only treatment for incontinence. Your doctor can help you understand why you leak urine and can help plan treatment. If all goes well, a sneeze will just be a sneeze, and you'll once again be able to enjoy a good laugh.





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PEC-PC-INC-004