

# Help for bladder control

Many people are inconvenienced and embarrassed by urinary incontinence—they leak urine when they laugh, cough, sneeze, exercise, or lift heavy objects. Incontinence affects more women than men.



Incontinence can be caused when muscles used to control the bladder weaken due to childbirth, menopause, or prostate surgery. Neurological complications caused by injury or stroke, or neurologic disease (like multiple sclerosis) can also weaken bladder control. The most common cause in older adults is called urinary incontinence or bladder instability: Frequent, involuntary bladder contractions release small amounts of urine.

If urinary incontinence is a problem, see a urologist, a doctor who specializes in problems of the urinary system. Medications, biofeedback bladder training, physical therapy, or surgery can improve or cure urinary incontinence.

## MANAGE URINARY INCONTINENCE

- Train your bladder to delay urination after you get the urge to urinate. Start by holding off for 10 minutes. The goal is to lengthen trips to the toilet to urinate only every 2.5 to 3.5 hours.
- Avoid highly spiced or acidic foods, which irritate the bladder. Avoid caffeine and alcohol at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- Practice Kegel exercises to improve bladder control. To feel the muscles to be exercised, practice stopping the flow of urine.
- If you wear sanitary pads or incontinence pads, change them often to prevent odor and infection.

## PRACTICE THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES

- Squeeze these muscles for 3 seconds, then relax the muscles for 3 seconds. Do this ten times, three times a day.
- Squeeze and relax the muscles as quickly as possible. Repeat ten times, three times a day.
- For women only: Imagine pulling up a tampon in the vagina. Hold for 3 seconds. Then bear down as if having a bowel movement, holding for 3 seconds.

