

# Do you Experience Incontinence?

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Incontinence is an unfortunate and all too common condition experienced by many. Some old myths state that it is a natural consequence of aging or of having children. This has prevented people who suffer from incontinence from seeking treatment. Other reasons for not seeking treatment include the idea that surgery is the only treatment and embarrassment about the condition. The facts about incontinence are: women of any age can experience episodes of incontinence, even young women athletes who have not have children, treatment at any age can be effective in dramatically reducing episodes of incontinence, and using clothing protection such as pads is not only expensive, but also not a treatment for incontinence.

There are two types of incontinence: stress and urge incontinence. Stress incontinence occurs when a forceful, sudden downward pressure on the pelvic floor, such as a cough or a sneeze, causes urine leakage. Urge incontinence is often referred to as the key in the door incontinence. You need to urinate and you are trying to unlock the door to get in the bathroom and you experience urine leakage in anticipation of urinating. You may experience mixed incontinence where you have both stress and urge incontinence. Both types of incontinence can be treated with pelvic floor muscle strengthening and retraining and the great news is that the treatments are non-invasive and have been very effective.

The pelvic floor is the sling of muscles that hold the bladder, uterus and colon in place. These muscles, like any other muscle in the body, will weaken over time without exercise. The Kegel exercise, which most of us are familiar with, is the tightening of these muscles. The pelvic floor lifts up when these muscles are contracted. If a Kegel exercise were done correctly while urinating, the stream of urine would stop flowing. (Note that this is not the time to perform the exercise, only a check technique.) What some people mistakenly do, however, is contract their abdominal or gluteal muscles instead of the pelvic floor muscle. This not only does not strengthen the muscles that prevent incontinence but actually can make incontinence worse by increasing the force pushing down on the pelvic floor.

Some people simply need education and assistance on how to perform these exercises correctly. There are other treatment options as well. Electrical stimulation to the pelvic floor muscles has shown to be very effective in regaining strength and control of the pelvic floor. Vaginal weights can also be used to strengthen the muscles and reduce incontinence. Medications and diet may also be changed or prescribed to help control incontinence.

These treatments can be provided by any physical therapy clinic that offers women's services.

How do you know if you are incontinent? If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you should seek a professional consultation.

- Do you have to urinate more than 3-4 times per night?
- Do you wear pads just in case?
- Do you urinate during the day more than every 3-4 hours?
- Do you modify your activities based on your urination patterns?