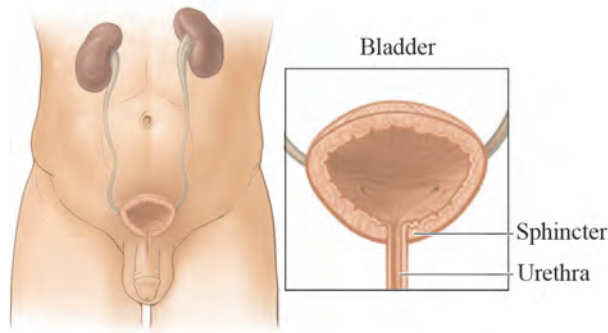


Urinary Incontinence in Men



Urinary incontinence is the accidental release of urine. Bladder control problems are very common, especially among older adults. Incontinence usually does not cause major health problems. But it can be embarrassing.

Luckily, there are many treatments for urinary incontinence. Treatment can cure or improve your symptoms.

What causes incontinence, and what are the symptoms?

Urinary incontinence occurs when the muscle (sphincter) that holds your bladder's outlet closed does not hold back the urine. This may happen if the sphincter is too weak, if the bladder muscles squeeze too strongly, or if the bladder is too full.

Stress incontinence occurs when you sneeze, cough, laugh, lift objects, or do other things that put stress on your bladder.

- It often develops after prostate surgery if there is damage to the nerves or the sphincter.
- It usually causes a small to medium amount of urine loss.

Urge incontinence is also called overactive bladder. It is an urge to urinate that is so strong that you often cannot reach the toilet in time.

- It can be caused by many conditions, including urinary tract infection, constipation, prostate infection, or nerve-damaging conditions such as Parkinson's disease or stroke. Often the cause cannot be found.
- It can result in sudden accidents in which you leak a large amount of urine. It also makes you need to urinate frequently, often at night.

Overflow incontinence is leakage that occurs when the bladder does not empty properly.

- It is usually due to a weak bladder or a blockage in the urethra. An enlarged prostate or narrowing of the urethra from scar tissue can cause a blockage.
- It causes dribbling of urine or an urge to urinate when you can only release a small amount of urine.

How is it diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask about your medical history. He or she will also ask about your symptoms and habits.
- You will have a physical exam, including an exam of the penis, prostate, and nervous system.
- Your doctor will probably do tests like a urinalysis and urine culture to see if you have an infection. He or she may do other tests to be sure of the diagnosis.

How is it treated?

If incontinence is not caused by an infection or a condition like cancer that can be cured by surgery, your treatment will proceed in stages.

- **Lifestyle changes** are the first step for all types of incontinence. These include reducing the amount of fluids you drink, giving up caffeine and carbonated drinks, and making a schedule for urinating.
- **Regular exercise** is important to keep your muscles in tone. Special exercises called pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises can cure or reduce incontinence. To do these, squeeze the same muscles you would use to stop your urine. Your belly and thighs should not move. Hold the squeeze for 3 seconds, and then relax for 3 seconds. Start with 3 seconds. Then add 1 second each week until you are able to squeeze for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 to 15 times a session. Do three or more sessions a day.
- **Medicines** may help, depending on the cause of your problem. For example, you may take medicine that calms your bladder if you have urge incontinence.
- **Self-catheterization** may be tried if surgery is not a good option for you. You insert a thin, hollow tube (catheter) through the urethra into the bladder so urine can drain out. This does not cure overflow incontinence, but it helps manage it.
- **Surgery** is usually considered when it is the only treatment that can cure incontinence. This may be the case if your urinary tract is blocked.
- **Continence products** may be used when you are getting a different treatment and are waiting to see if your incontinence goes away. Or they may be used if other treatments failed. Products include absorbent

pads or diapers. Do not use these products without also getting checked or treated. You might have a more serious problem that could have a cure.

What can you do at home?

- Get in the habit of urinating every 3 to 4 hours, whether you feel the need or not.
- Practice "double voiding": Urinate as much as you can, relax for a few moments, and then urinate again.
- If you have trouble reaching the toilet in time, clear the path to the bathroom, wear clothes that are easy to remove, or keep a bedpan close to your bed or chair.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine.
- Do not drink too much or too little fluid.

More long-term steps can make a difference:

- Get regular exercise, and do Kegel exercises every day.
- Lose some weight if you need to.
- If you smoke, quit. This may reduce coughing and improve incontinence.
- Changing your diet can help. Cut back on foods that might irritate your bladder. These include citrus fruits, chocolate, tomatoes, vinegars, milk and other dairy foods, spicy foods, and aspartame (Equal, NutraSweet).