

IMPROVING URINARY INCONTINENCE

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,
AND CAREGIVERS



READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- What Urinary Incontinence is.
- How to Manage Urinary Incontinence.
- What Pelvic Floor Exercises are and How to do them.



**Sinai
Health**

Healthy Ageing
and Geriatrics



UHN

Toronto General
Toronto Western
Princess Margaret
Toronto Rehab
Michener Institute

WHAT IS URINARY INCONTINENCE?

If you are unable to control your bladder, you may leak urine out of your body even if you don't mean to. If this happens often, you may have Urinary Incontinence (UI). Although it is more common in older adults, it is not a "normal" part of ageing. Urinary incontinence can be caused by many different factors such as weak pelvic floor muscles, drinks or food that stimulate the bladder muscles such as caffeine, alcoholic beverages and spicy foods; and/or issues that obstruct urine flow like an enlarged prostate or prolapse of a pelvic organ.

At least 1 in 8 Canadians aged 65 and older suffer from urinary incontinence. If you find urinary incontinence affects your daily activities, simple lifestyle changes or medical treatments can help alleviate discomfort and improve urinary leakage.

DO I HAVE URINARY INCONTINENCE?

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:



1. Do you leak urine while laughing, coughing, sneezing or lifting objects?
2. Do you leak urine on your way to the toilet?
3. Do you rush to the bathroom and are unable to "make it on time"?

HOW CAN I PREVENT URINARY INCONTINENCE?

Urinary incontinence can affect how comfortable you are going out in public and your overall quality of life. The good news is that there are some lifestyle changes you can make to your everyday activities that can help reduce and better manage your symptoms.

REDUCING OR REMOVING CAFFEINE FROM YOUR DIET

Caffeine can affect how well your bladder works. It can stimulate the bladder muscle and cause it to contract too frequently.

Foods and drinks with caffeine include things like:

- Coffee
- Tea
- Pop
- Chocolate



Even 1 cup of coffee or tea may have too much caffeine for your bladder.

Try to reduce the amount of caffeine you consume for 2 weeks. Use a diary to write down how many times you experience urinary incontinence before and after you make this change. If your symptoms improve, continue to avoid/minimize caffeine.



REDUCING OR QUITTING SMOKING

Smoking can make urinary incontinence worse. Smoking can irritate the bladder muscle and cause it to contract too frequently. Talk to your primary care provider about ways to help you stop smoking. Quitting smoking will also help prevent urinary incontinence from occurring.

WHAT ARE TIPS FOR IMPROVING URINARY INCONTINENCE?

DRINKING THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF FLUIDS



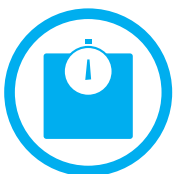
If you don't drink much during the day, drinking more fluids (not including alcohol or caffeine) can reduce urinary incontinence. When you don't drink enough fluids, your urine becomes concentrated. Concentrated urine can irritate your bladder wall causing it to contract more frequently and give you the sense of urgency and frequency. Of course, avoiding fluids before bedtime and before outings can reduce accidents during these times.

REDUCE ALCOHOL INTAKE



Drinking alcohol can make your urinary incontinence worse. Alcohol also causes unnecessary bladder contractions. Reducing the amount you drink or stopping to drink it completely can help improve your symptoms.

LOSING WEIGHT

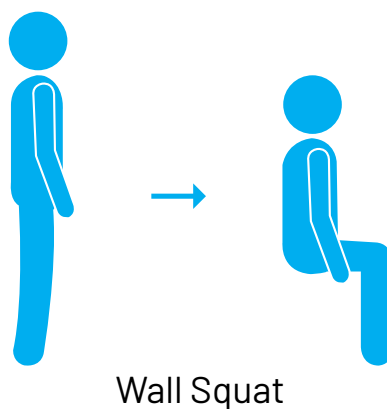
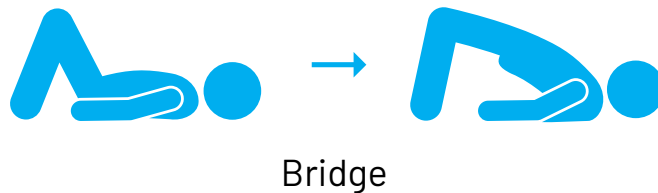


Being overweight can put extra stress on the muscles of the pelvic floor. This extra stress can weaken the muscles. If you are overweight, trying to lose weight can improve your symptoms. It is best to lose weight by changing your diet and exercising regularly.

WHAT DO I DO IF THE PROBLEM CONTINUES?

If the above activities do not improve or stop your urinary incontinence, speak to your health care provider. Your health care provider may be able to further assess your urinary incontinence or refer you to a Nurse Continence Advisor, Urologist or Gynecologist for further assessment and support.

WHAT ARE EXERCISES FOR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES?



WHAT ARE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES?

Pelvic floor muscles are a group of muscles that extend from the pelvis that form its floor. These muscles help to support and keep your bladder, bowel, and, if a female, your uterus in place. They are the muscles you contract or tighten to stop rectal gas and urine flow. Pelvic floor muscles can become weak as we age and from a variety of causes and when they do, some people experience unintentional urine loss (urinary incontinence).

Pelvic floor muscle exercises can make the muscles stronger and stop or reduce incontinence. Always consult your primary care provider before starting these exercises.

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES FOR WOMEN TO REDUCE INCONTINENCE

In women, pelvic floor muscles can become weak due to childbirth, trauma or surgery to the pelvic organs, diabetes, and chronic constipation to name a few. Strengthening these muscles can stop or reduce the number of episodes of incontinence. It is never too late to begin pelvic floor strengthening exercises.

Properly contracting your pelvic floor muscles can be difficult. To try and locate the muscles, pretend to stop passing gas or urine.

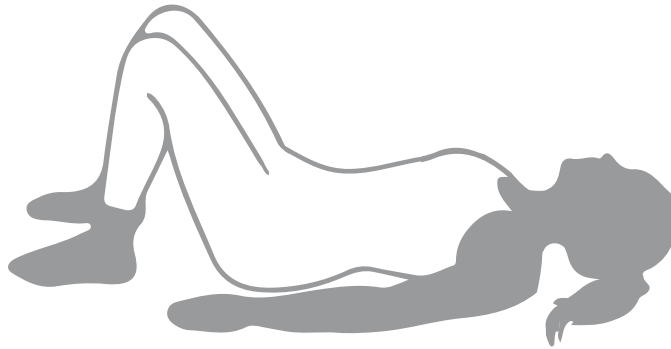
TIP: *You want to avoid holding your breath or contracting your buttocks or abdominal muscles as it means you are not contracting your pelvic floor muscles.

How to do Pelvic Floor Exercises:

“The Wave”:

While lying on your back with knees bent, try to tighten your pelvic floor muscles one section at a time. Begin by contracting the anus as if you wanted to prevent the passage of gas.

Hold for 5 seconds and relax. Contract the vagina as if you wanted to stop urine flow. Hold again for 5 seconds and relax. Finally contract in the front as if you wanted to hold urine. Hold for 5 seconds and relax. Wait for 10 seconds before starting another contraction. Do this exercise 3 times a day, 5-10 times each.



“The Elevator”:

While lying on your back with knees bent, slowly contract all the muscles of the pelvic floor at the same time. Imagine your pelvic floor is like an elevator that can go up from the 1st to the 3rd floor.

Try to contract the pelvic muscles gradually one floor at a time. When you have reached the 3rd floor, hold the contraction for 3 seconds then gradually relax ‘floor by floor’ down to the 1st. Do this exercise 3 times a day, 5-10 times each.

Once you feel comfortable with these exercises in the lying position, progress to doing one session in the sitting position, one session in the standing position and one session in the lying position each day. Then you can try and add the following exercises to your program:

Speed of Pelvic Floor Exercises:

Do quick, repetitive contractions of the pelvic floor. Hold/relax, try 10 times in 10 seconds, 3 times a day.

Endurance of Pelvic Floor Exercises:

Try to hold a moderate contraction of the pelvic floor for 10–15 seconds. Later, try for longer periods of time, progressing gradually to contractions lasting 30 seconds. Do this exercise 5 times a day.

Beneficial Times to Contract Your Pelvic Floor Muscles:

Contract your pelvic floor muscles before doing any activity requiring effort (e.g. coughing, sneezing, rising from a chair or lifting a grocery bag). Make sure to maintain the contraction throughout the activity.

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES FOR MEN

In men, pelvic floor muscles can become weak due to disorders such as diabetes, after bladder or prostate surgery, or from an overactive bladder. This can impact your ability to remain continent and may find that you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise. You may also find that you have trouble delaying the urge to urinate and find you are unable to make it to the toilet on time.

Similar to women, pelvic floor exercises, if done properly, can improve muscle strength and help to reduce or stop incontinence.

When you first start these exercises, find a quiet place to relax. This helps you exercise the correct muscles. It can sometimes be difficult to locate the right muscles to contract.

To locate the muscles, it is best to sit down. Try to squeeze only the muscles that prevent you from passing rectal gas. Try not to tighten up your abdominal muscles, buttocks muscles or to hold your breath.

After you get used to doing these exercises, you can do them any time, any place and in any position.

How to do a Pelvic Muscle Exercise:

To do 1 pelvic muscle exercise, follow these steps:

1. Squeeze your pelvic muscle – you will notice your penis and scrotum rise if you are contracting the muscles properly.
2. Hold and count slowly...“1 and 2 and 3”
3. Relax for a count of... “1 and 2 and 3”
4. You can do these exercises lying down, sitting or standing.
 - 10 exercises are called 1 set. Do 1 set 3-5 times a day.
 - As you get better at doing these exercises, you can count to 5 and then relax for 5
 - **You want to try and contract and relax your muscles for the same amount of time. So, adapt your count to be able to do this (example: start with a “1, 2 count” if that is all you are able to control for when you contract and relax the muscles).**

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

HEALTHLINK BC - URINARY INCONTINENCE IN WOMEN

HealthLinkBC provides additional information, tips and strategies, and frequently asked questions on improving urinary incontinence for women.



<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/urinary-incontinence-women>

HEALTHLINK BC - URINARY INCONTINENCE IN MEN

HealthLinkBC provides additional information, tips and strategies, and frequently asked questions on improving urinary incontinence for men.



<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/urinary-incontinence-men>

RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

- Managing Constipation

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Alcohol and Your Health
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Living Longer, Living Well: Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Anxiety
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Depression
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.

This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

We would like to thank the following for their support of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing Initiative:



**The Ben and
Hilda Katz
Foundation**



Mon Sheong Foundation and the Ben and Hilda Katz Foundation have generously provided funding to support printing and translation of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing.

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility supported this initiative with funding through its Seniors Community Grant Program.

Adapted from “General Tips for Memory Problems” in 2016 with permission from the University Health Network Patient and Family Education Program.

Author: Healthy Ageing and Geriatrics Program, Sinai Health System and UHN
Modified: 01/2022