Urinary Incontinence in Women

About urinary incontinence
Urinary incontinence means losing control of urine passing from the bladder. This is common in women and can occur because of problems with the muscles that help to hold or release urine flow. Incontinence can be caused by pregnancy and childbirth, menopause, aging, stroke, or other problems. Some women may lose a few drops of urine when they cough or laugh. Others may feel a sudden urge to urinate and cannot control it.

Urinary incontinence can be embarrassing, upsetting and get in the way of doing activities. Fortunately, it can often be treated and there are options depending on the cause. Talk to your health care provider about testing and treatment.

Treatment options
- **Kegel exercises** - Also known as pelvic floor exercises, these strengthen the muscles that control urine flow.
- **Electrical stimulation** - A small non-painful electric pulse is used to help calm the nerves and muscles of the bladder.
- **Biofeedback** - You learn to control the muscles of your bladder based on measurements from devices.
- **Medicines** - Various medicines are used to treat this. Talk to your provider about their risks and benefits.
- **Behavior modification** - You change behaviors that may make the urine leakage more of a problem.
- **Pessary** - A ring placed in the vagina puts pressure on the opening of the bladder to help control urine leaks.
- **Implant** - The tissues around the bladder opening are injected with a substance to surround and tighten it.
- **Surgery** - If other treatments have not worked, surgery may be an option. The type of surgery can vary.

Types
- **Stress Incontinence**
  Urine leaks after a cough, laugh, sneeze, or other physical activity because the muscles that control the flow of urine are weak.

- **Urge Incontinence**
  The bladder contracts and releases urine when it is not supposed to and leaking occurs. This happens when there is a sudden feeling or need to urinate. It can happen during sleep, after drinking water, or when you touch water or hear it running.

- **Mixed Incontinence**
  This is when a person has both stress and urge incontinence.

- **Overflow Incontinence**
  This happens when a woman is not able to empty her bladder well. The bladder gets full and overflows to cause urine to leak.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.
For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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