

# URINARY INCONTINENCE TEACHING TOOL

## URINARY INCONTINENCE DEFINED

Urinary incontinence is the loss of bladder control, which leads to unplanned urination or leakage of urine. Some types of incontinence are caused by an increase in pressure, while other types are the result of weakened bladder muscles. Weak bladder muscles change the anatomy by realigning the angle of the bladder in relationship to the urethra (tube connecting the bladder to the outside of the body). This anatomical change occurs naturally during the initial phase of urination and is perceived by the brain as the “green light” to urinate.

## TYPES OF URINARY INCONTINENCE

1. **Stress incontinence**—This form of incontinence results from the increased pressure on the bladder during a cough, sneeze, laugh or expulsion of flatus. Usually, weakened muscles around the bladder floor cause stress incontinence.
2. **Urge incontinence**—Incontinence occurs once the urge is present to urinate. The urge and flow of urine are simultaneous. The cause of this type of incontinence is usually a motor disorder whereby there is a change in the muscle’s normal reaction to a nerve impulse.
3. **Reflex incontinence**—For those suffering with this type of incontinence, there is no sensation to warn the individual of the need to urinate. It results from a spinal cord malfunction.
4. **Overflow incontinence**—This type of incontinence results from the inability to urinate. The body retains the urine in the urinary bladder. As the bladder becomes overfull, the urine leaks out. This incontinence is caused by an obstruction, such as an enlarged prostate.
5. **Psychological incontinence**—This inability to control the flow of urine results from changes in the mental status.
6. **Environmental incontinence**—This type of incontinence results from the individual’s inability to mobilize to toilet facilities.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TREAT INCONTINENCE

Doctors have made great progress in diagnosing and treating urinary incontinence. It is important to obtain a thorough physical evaluation to determine the cause. Identifying the cause will ensure that the proper treatment is provided. Maintaining proper weight is essential.

A common cause of incontinence is a weakness of the pelvic floor muscles. As they age, this problem is very common for women who have given birth. The Kegel exercise strengthens these muscles, and it is simple to perform. The exercise is to be repeated 10 to 20 times per session at least three times a day. The five-step exercise routine is as follows:

1. Identify the group of muscles to be strengthened by stopping and starting the flow of urine several times during urination.

2. Tighten these muscles for the count of three (count one 1,000; two 1,000; three 1,000).
3. Relax the muscles for the count of three.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 ten times; gradually increase to 20 times per session.
5. Space the three sessions throughout the day.

Other keys to urinary regularity include the importance to:

- Drink at least two quarts of liquids every day (unless you have another diagnosis that prohibits this intake volume). Avoid caffeinated beverages as they can irritate the bladder.
- Maintain a schedule for toileting. Check how often you are incontinent and make certain that you attempt to urinate before you reach your limit. Strive to increase that limit gradually as you strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.
- Visit your doctor if the treatment prescribed does not work. Your doctor may recommend the assistance of biofeedback or devices that can be implanted or inserted to control the urinary flow. (In rare instances, an indwelling urinary catheter is inserted to ensure control. Complications of long-term catheter use include frequent urinary tract infections, expense and inconvenience.)
- Check your skin carefully for areas of excoriation (red, open, presence of rash).
- Keep your skin clean and dry. You may want to use a vapor barrier ointment. Ask your nurse or pharmacist for a recommendation.
- Document bowel and bladder training, according to time and results

### **WHEN TO NOTIFY YOUR PHYSICIAN**

Notify your physician if you have:

- increased incontinence
- pain or burning while urinating
- frequent urination
- sores on your skin
- temperature above 99.6°F

### **MEDICAL APPOINTMENT FOLLOW-THROUGH**

It is very important that you schedule and keep your doctor appointments. Your doctor has ordered home care to *supplement* his or her care, not to replace it. Your doctor is the only person who can make changes in your treatment that may be indicated. Discuss any transportation problems you may have with your nurse—there may be ways to help you. Always notify your doctor should you develop signs of a urinary tract infection (fever, burning with urination, urge to urinate without presence of urine, foul odor to urine) or have continued incontinence despite following treatment suggestions.