

About Incontinence

Types of Incontinence

Incontinence affects different individuals in different ways.

Common forms of urinary incontinence include:

- **Stress:** People with stress incontinence may experience leakage when coughing, sneezing, laughing, exercising, lifting and performing other kinds of strenuous activity. Childbirth and some surgeries can weaken the pelvic floor (the muscles under the bladder) allowing urine to escape when the abdomen is under stress. Young women often experience this form of incontinence.

Stress incontinence is usually caused by having a weak sphincter mechanism. The muscles of the pelvic floor and the sphincter muscle are unable to keep the bladder outlet tube (urethra) closed during straining activities that increase pressure inside the abdomen.

- **Urge:** People with urge incontinence may lose large amounts of urine. There's a feeling of not being able to reach the toilet fast enough. Urge incontinence is usually caused by having an 'overactive bladder', one that contracts before you give it permission to.

Many people experience urge incontinence due to infections that irritate the bladder or bladder outlet tube (urethra), or cause muscle spasms, which force the urine out of the bladder. A stroke, spinal cord injury, dementia or diseases that affect the nervous system, such as Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis can bring it on.

- **Mixed:** Many people experience both stress and urge incontinence at different times or under different circumstances. The causes of the two forms may or may not be related, and should be evaluated separately.

Other common symptoms include frequency and nocturia.

- **Frequency:** Described as going to the toilet more than about six times a day and passing a small amount of urine each time. In normal circumstances it should be possible for you to hold on to about 350mls each time.
- **Nocturia:** Getting out of bed more than once a night (twice if you are aged over 60 years).

Less common forms of incontinence include:

- **Overflow:** Some women either do not get the urge to urinate or have a blockage in the tube that passes from the bladder out of the body (urethra). In both of these instances, the bladder never completely empties, and when it overfills, excess urine is forced out. Nervous system disorders and spinal cord injuries are frequent causes of overflow incontinence. Men can experience symptoms of overflow incontinence due to benign prostate hyperplasia. People with diabetes also experience overflow incontinence (neuropathy of the bladder).
- **Functional:** People who are unable or unwilling to use a toilet are functionally incontinent. Examples include severe arthritis or confusion brought on by other illnesses that prevents a person from using a toilet without assistance.
- **Total:** Total incontinence is rare. A birth defect or injury may cause urine to leak from the body uncontrollably. Some people with dementia may lose bladder control only during the night. Dementia is the result of any number of illnesses that cause mental deterioration, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease.
- **Medication-Related:** Some medications may cause incontinence by relaxing muscles or by blocking signals sent from a full bladder to the brain. In these instances, your doctor may change your medications to eliminate the side-effects.

