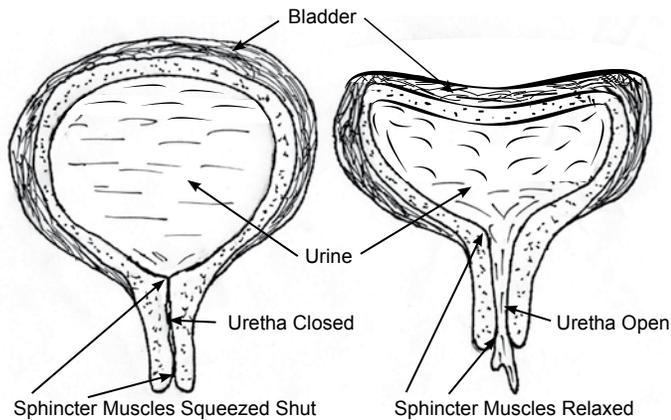


## Information for Women

# What Is Urinary Incontinence?

### HOW THE BLADDER WORKS

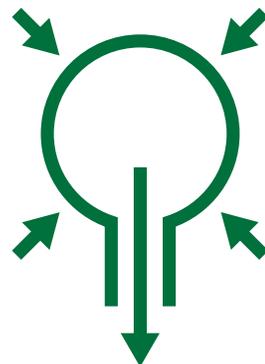
In your body, urine is stored in an organ called the bladder. Your bladder is relaxed most of the time. When you want to urinate, your brain tells your bladder to contract, sending the urine out.



### WHAT IS INCONTINENCE?

Urinary incontinence means that you leak urine when you don't want to. About one-third of women sometimes leak urine. Some women leak only a little, and some may leak a lot. Not all women feel that leaking is a serious problem for them.

There are two main reasons why women leak urine: **stress incontinence** and **urge incontinence**.



*If pressure from outside squeezes the urine out of the bladder, that is stress incontinence.*

**Stress incontinence** means you leak urine when you cough, sneeze, exercise, bend over or lift heavy objects. This leakage happens because these events cause an increase of physical pressure on your bladder.

With stress incontinence, the problem is that the muscles and tissues in your pelvic floor are not strong enough to resist external pressure. When extra pressure is placed on the abdomen from activities like coughing, laughing, jumping or lifting, urine is forced past the muscles that keep the urethra closed. This can happen when the muscles in your pelvic area are weakened by having babies, by chronic constipation requiring straining, by obesity, or simply by getting older.



Coughing or sneezing increases the physical pressure on your bladder.

# What is Urinary Incontinence?

**Urge incontinence** is when you feel an urgent need to pass urine and you are unable to make it to the toilet in time. Your bladder is contracting when you don't want it to! You may have little or no warning that this is going to happen, or you may have a sudden strong need to urinate. There may be triggers that cause this urgency, such as hearing running water, feeling chilled, arriving at your house door, or standing up from a chair or bed. People with urge incontinence may also need to urinate often and get up several times in the night. With urge incontinence, the problem is an overactive bladder muscle.



*If your bladder suddenly contracts on its own, that is urgency; if urine leaks out, that is urge incontinence*

Many women have a combination of stress and urge incontinence called **mixed incontinence**. It is good to know what kind of incontinence you have because the causes and treatments are different.

## WHAT IS NORMAL?

An average woman urinates up to 7 times during the day (about every 2-3 hours). It is normal to get up once in the night to urinate, and twice as you get older. Normal bladder capacity is 300 – 600 ml (250ml = 1 cup)

Normal fluid intake is about 6-8 cups of water or other drinks per day. Drinking more or less than this amount can make leaking worse. Drinks that have caffeine, like tea, coffee and colas, can also make leaking worse because they irritate the bladder.

**Fecal incontinence** means an unwanted leakage of bowel contents – gas, liquid or solid stool. Some women have problems with both fecal and urinary incontinence. This can be because of pelvic floor muscle weakness.