

Urinary incontinence: Urologists, new treatment options offer relief

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Urinary incontinence or the accidental release of urine can be a vexing problem at any stage of life. Loss of urinary control is common and affects both children and adults. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that 13 million Americans suffer from urinary incontinence, and one in four women over the age of 30 have experienced bladder control problems. During childhood, however, the number of boys with an incontinence issue outnumbers girls, although children typically outgrow leaking and bedwetting issues.

Types of Incontinence

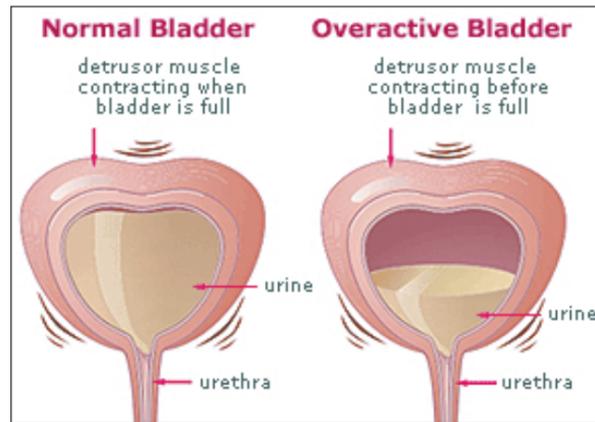
Two types of bladder control problems are urge incontinence and stress incontinence. A sudden or surprise leak that gives the patient the sense that he needs to urinate is the classic sensation associated with urge incontinence. In this case, an overactive bladder causes frequent urination during the day and night and is usually accompanied by some sense of urgency. On the other hand, leaking during any sort of strained activity like laughing, coughing, or exertion is stress incontinence. Most commonly, both of these conditions contribute to leaking, and this condition is called mixed incontinence.

Causes of Incontinence

There are a number of factors that can impair bladder control. Younger adult women may experience incontinence related to pregnancy and childbirth, while older females may notice loss of bladder control after a hysterectomy. Later in life, both men and women may suffer from incontinence because of loss of muscle, ligament and connective tissue support along the pelvic floor due to the body's natural aging process. Incontinence in men can be related to prostate problems or nerve problems such as diabetes, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injury. Previous treatments and surgeries and medical conditions such as diabetes, stroke and lower back problems can all contribute to urinary incontinence.

Treatment of Incontinence

Those who seek help from qualified urologists can improve incontinence with treatment. In the



past, treatment options were limited and surgeries were invasive. Recent advances in medicine offer significant benefits: Exercises, medications and minimally invasive surgeries are just a few of them.

Diagnosis is the first step in determining what treatment options are available. A urologist will gather a patient's complete medical history, including previous treatments, surgeries and medical conditions. Then, a pelvic exam will help identify conditions that may be causing bladder control problems. A physician may also test a patient's urine to rule out infection, and a diary that records frequency and amount of urination may assist the physician in determining the cause and severity of the leakage. If surgery is being considered or if initial treatments have been unsuccessful, additional tests to examine the bladder or urethra may be performed. Although the diagnostic process may be long, it provides an accurate diagnosis that's essential to treatment success.

Treatment for urinary incontinence varies for each person, based on the type and severity. Non-invasive therapies like behavioral modifications are usually tried first, and they may be the only treatment needed for mild cases. Some modifications include a combination of timed voiding, dietary changes and weight loss. For mild cases of incontinence, a doctor may also prescribe physical therapy to strengthen pelvic muscles to improve bladder control. Physical therapists may also use biofeedback and electrostimulation devices as training aids. A daily prescription can successfully control overactive bladder in some cases. In more complex cases, multiple medications, physical therapy, and neuromodulation (stimulating the nerves to the bladder with low-voltage electricity) can be used to

Incontinence Quiz

1. Have you stopped running, jogging or other activities because of accidental urination?
2. Do you leak urine when you laugh, cough, sneeze or lift something heavy?
3. Do you have to run to the bathroom to avoid leaking?
4. Do you need to urinate more than 7 times a day?
5. Do you use protective pads in case you leak?
6. Have you delivered more than one baby vaginally?
7. Do you frequently have a strong, sudden urge to urinate?



If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, consult a qualified health care professional to explore your treatment options for incontinence. You can take this questionnaire to your appointment.

achieve significant improvement. Lastly, for more severe cases of stress incontinence, a number of surgical options are available that can be performed as a simple outpatient procedure. Post-operative pain and recovery are minimized, and some people can return to normal activities in just a few weeks.

Dr. Chen is a board certified urologist. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Yale University and earned his medical degree at Medical College of Georgia, where he was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha, the national medical school honor society. He completed his General Surgery internship and Urology residency at the University of Michigan. He is experienced in laparoscopy and minimally invasive techniques for the treatment of benign and malignant urologic disease.