

# Stress Urinary Incontinence

## What is stress urinary incontinence?

**Stress urinary** [YOO-rin-air-ee] **incontinence** [in-CAHN-tin-enss] (also called stress incontinence) is when you leak urine during activities like coughing, sneezing, laughing, running, jumping, or lifting. The leaking stops when the activity stops.

Millions of people have some type of urinary incontinence. Stress urinary incontinence is the most common type and is most often experienced by women.

## What causes stress incontinence?

Stress incontinence happens when the muscles and tissues of the pelvic floor become weak. The weakness keeps the **urethra** [yoo-REETH-rah] from closing completely, so urine leaks out. (The urethra is the tube that urine flows through as it leaves the body.)

Stress incontinence can also be caused when a pelvic organ (such as the bladder) bulges or sinks down out of normal position (**prolapse**). Other things that can cause this weakness are:

- Childbirth and menopause
- Carrying extra weight
- Poor physical conditioning
- Increasing age
- Smoking



## What do I need to do right now?

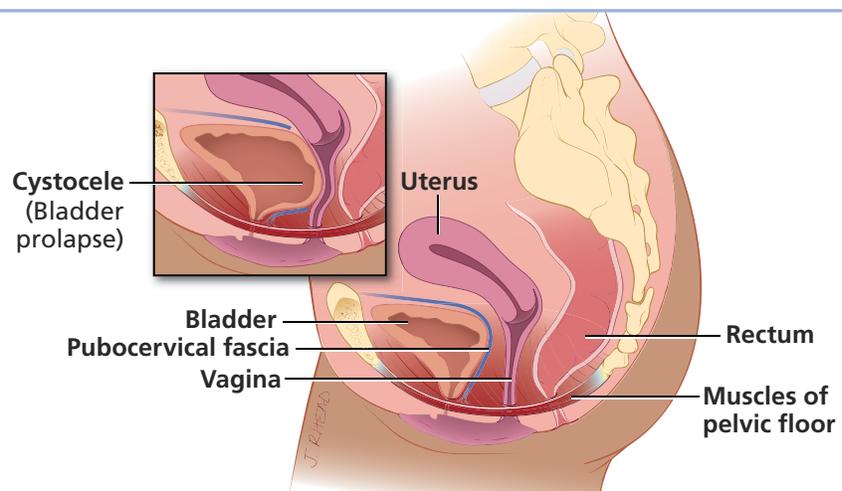
- 1 Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you are taking. Include all prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines (such as cough syrup or allergy pills), inhalers, patches, vitamins, or herbal remedies.
- 2 Work with your doctor to lose weight (if you need to) and be more active.
- 3 Practice your Kegel exercises to strengthen the muscles in the pelvic floor that control your bladder and urethra:
  - To start, tighten the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. (If you're not sure you're using the right muscles, first try it while you're urinating.)
  - Keep squeezing the muscles for a count of 10, then slowly relax.
  - Repeat several times a day, working up to 100 Kegels a day.

There are several variations on this basic exercise. Follow your doctor's specific advice for you.

Weakness in the pelvic muscles can cause you to lose the ability to hold urine in your bladder.

It can also cause prolapse of the bladder (cystocele), vagina, or rectum.

Kegel exercises will help strengthen these muscles.



## How is stress incontinence diagnosed?

To find out if you have stress incontinence and what might be causing it, your doctor will:

- Ask about your health and lifestyle, your symptoms and when they started, and how they affect your daily life.
- Perform a pelvic exam and examine your belly and rectum.

Your doctor may also order tests of your blood or urine and may recommend one or more of the following tests:

- **Ultrasound:** Uses sound waves to create a picture of the inside of your body.
- **Urodynamics:** Measures the pressure, capacity, and flow rate of your bladder as it fills or empties.
- **Cystoscopy:** Examines the inside of the bladder and urethra with a thin, lighted tube inserted through the urethra.



### Following up with your doctor

It may take some trial and error to find what works best to improve or cure your stress incontinence. So don't give up, and stay in touch with your doctor. It's especially important to call your doctor if:

- Your incontinence is not improving
- You have questions about your treatment or its side effects
- You need additional support to quit smoking or lose weight

#### My follow-up appointment

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_

## How is stress incontinence treated?

Treatment can cure or improve most cases of stress incontinence. The treatments below may be used alone or in combination:

- **Lifestyle changes.** Your doctor may suggest a weight loss program or a change in your diet. You may need to take steps to regulate the timing of your trips to the bathroom. If you smoke, your doctor will suggest you quit and will help you do so.
- **Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles.** Certain exercises can strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that surround your urethra and may help control urine leakage. Kegel exercises are commonly recommended for this. To start:
  - Tighten the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. (If you're not sure you're using the right muscles, first try it while you're urinating.)
  - Keep squeezing the muscles for a count of 10, then slowly relax.
  - Repeat several times a day, working up to 100 Kegels a day.

For people who have difficulty with Kegels, a doctor may recommend biofeedback or electrical stimulation to help strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.

- **Medicine.** Medicine is sometimes used to treat mixed incontinence, in which symptoms of stress incontinence and urge incontinence are combined.
- **Pessary.** For a woman with stress incontinence, the doctor may recommend using a **pessary** [PEHS-uh-ree], a device that fits in the vagina to support the pelvic organs.
- **Injections.** Your doctor may suggest injecting collagen or another material (called a bulking agent) into the tissues around the urethra and lower part of the bladder. The bulking agent can thicken the tissues and help close the bladder opening.
- **Surgery.** Most of the time, a doctor will suggest surgery only after other treatments haven't worked. The type of surgery recommended will depend on the cause of your incontinence.

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