

# Urinary Incontinence

Problems controlling when your urine (“pee”) comes out

## What is urinary incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is when you are not able to control when your urine (“pee”) comes out. Either you cannot pee when you want to, or you cannot stop your pee from coming out.

There are different types of urinary incontinence.

### Stress incontinence

Urine leaks during certain activities. This may happen during lifting, sneezing, coughing, laughing or exercising.

### Functional incontinence

When your body, your mind or the situation you are in prevents you from controlling your urine.

You may not be able to get to a toilet in time if you:

- Have trouble walking.
- Do not know where a toilet is.
- Do not realize you have to urinate.

### Overflow incontinence

Urine dribbles from an overly full bladder.

You may have:

- Frequent urination of small amounts
- A hard time starting to urinate
- A slow stream
- A feeling that your bladder has not completely emptied.



### Urge incontinence

Also called “overactive bladder”. You may feel a strong need to urinate (“go pee”). Sometimes the urge is so strong that you cannot control it and your bladder empties by itself.

### Mixed incontinence

You have more than one type of incontinence.

## What causes cancer-related urinary incontinence?

Cancer and cancer treatments can damage or put stress on the muscles and nerves that control the release of urine.

If you cough a lot this can put stress on your bladder.

Urinary incontinence after some cancer treatments may get better as your body heals, but sometimes it is permanent (does not go away).

## When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team if you have any urinary incontinence. If it is not managed, it can cause many problems for you. Your skin could get irritated and break down if it is not attended to. Your quality of life may go down if you have difficulty keeping clean.

Your health care team will try to find the cause of the problem. They may ask you to keep a journal about when, how often and how much you are urinating. You may need tests to check for infection or to look more closely at your bladder function.

Your health care team can:

- Treat medical problems that cause urinary incontinence.
- Give you support and help you find resources in your community.
- Refer you to specialists, if needed.

## What are the treatments for urinary incontinence?

Depending on the cause of your urinary incontinence and how bad it is, you may be offered medicine, a medical device or surgery.

### Medicines

Medicines work in different ways to:

- Relax the bladder muscle.
- Block nerve signals that can cause bladder spasms (when the bladder muscle squeezes without warning, making you need to urinate).
- Increase the amount of urine the bladder can hold.

### Medical Devices

Your healthcare team will talk to you about these if they think they might help.

Biofeedback uses a device to monitor muscle contraction. It can help you know which muscles your body uses to control urine. It may make these muscles stronger and improve bladder control.

### Surgery

If needed, your health care team will refer you to a surgeon to talk about your options.

## What can I do for myself?

### Use absorbent pads

To protect your skin and your clothing, you may need to use absorbent pads or liners made for urine loss.

### Schedule urination

Urinating every 2-3 hours while you are awake will help stop your bladder from getting too full. This can help with urge incontinence.

### Exercise

“Kegel” exercises strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These can be helpful for stress incontinence.

Tighten or squeeze the muscles around your anus as if you are trying to prevent gas from passing. Hold the squeeze for 10 seconds. Then relax for 10 seconds. Do these 10 times in a row. Do these exercises at least 3 times a day.

## Where can I learn more?

- BC Cancer Library Bowel and Bladder Problems pathfinder: [bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder-bowel](http://bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder-bowel)
- BC Cancer Supportive Care Services: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/supportivecare](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/supportivecare)

