

# Urinary Incontinence Treatment

Treatment for urinary incontinence depends on the type, cause and severity. Your health care provider will suggest which treatment approaches are best for you and will usually recommend the least invasive treatments first. Treatment options generally fall into four categories: behavioral techniques, medications, devices and surgery.

## BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES

Behavioral techniques and lifestyle changes can help treat certain types of urinary incontinence.

**Bladder re-training** involves learning to delay urinating after you feel the urge to go. Done alone or in combination with other therapies, it helps to control urge and other types of incontinence.

**Scheduled toileting.** This technique means you use the toilet according to the clock rather than waiting for the urge.

**Pelvic floor muscle exercises.** Kegel exercises can strengthen your urinary sphincter and pelvic floor muscles. They can especially help with stress incontinence, but may also help urge incontinence.

**Liquid and diet management.** Modifying your daily habits may help treat your incontinence. You may need to reduce or avoid alcohol, caffeine or acidic foods if they cause you to be incontinent. Weight reduction and limiting liquid consumption before bedtime can help.

**Electrical stimulation.** In this procedure,

### Your health care provider will help you

choose an incontinence product specifically for your needs, one that will allow you to remain as ambulatory/mobile as possible, promoting the highest achievable level of continence and overall health. As much as possible, you should be involved in your incontinence care and understand that the loss of bladder control is a symptom, not a disease.

—Melissa DeMarinis,  
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a therapist temporarily inserts electrodes into your rectum or vagina to stimulate and strengthen pelvic floor muscles. This can effectively treat stress and urge incontinence, but it takes several months and multiple treatments to work. Side effects include abdominal cramps, diarrhea and bleeding. This approach is usually used for severe urge incontinence that doesn't respond to other techniques or medications.

## MEDICATIONS

The following drugs are commonly used to treat incontinence:

**Anticholinergic (antispasmodic) drugs.** Used to calm an overactive bladder, these prescription medications may be helpful in treating urge incontinence.

**Imipramine (Tofranil).** This antidepressant relaxes the bladder muscle and contracts the smooth muscles at the bladder neck.

**Hormone replacement.** Applying estrogen via a vaginal cream, ring or patch can help relieve some symptoms of incontinence. However, hormone replacement therapy as a combination of estrogen plus progestin may have serious risks and side effects, so discuss this carefully with your health care provider.

**Antibiotics.** If a urinary tract infection or an inflamed prostate gland (prostatitis) is causing your incontinence, your health care provider will prescribe antibiotics.

**Others.** Drugs that relax your urinary sphincter or cause your bladder to have more contractions may help treat your incontinence, but it depends on the underlying cause. Be sure to discuss potential side effects with your provider.

## DEVICES

Several medical devices have been designed to treat incontinence in women, including:

**Urethral inserts.** Before engaging in an activity that causes incontinence, a woman can insert this small, tampon-like disposable device into her urethra to prevent urine

leakage. Upon feeling the need to urinate, she removes the device. These are available by prescription and they aren't intended for daily use.

**Pessary.** This is a stiff ring that a woman can insert into her vagina and wear all day, although she needs to remove it regularly for cleaning. It helps hold up the bladder to keep urine from leaking. It may help treat incontinence that results from a dropped (prolapsed) bladder or uterus. These are available by prescription only.

## SURGERY

If other treatments don't work, surgery to remove an enlarged prostate gland, a tumor in the bladder or a uterine fibroid can also help treat incontinence. Various surgical techniques can also reposition a slipped bladder or uterus or strengthen weakened urinary sphincter muscles.

## OTHER PRODUCTS

If none of these treatments eliminate your incontinence or if you need help controlling your incontinence while undergoing treatment, several products can help with urine leakage.

**Absorbent pads and protective garments.** Many types of absorbent pads or underwear can help manage urine loss. You can wear many of these products under everyday clothing. These products include drip collectors, panty liners, adult diapers, plastic underwear and washable underwear and briefs with waterproof panels. Drug stores, supermarkets and medical supply stores carry these types of products.

**Catheters.** If you're experiencing incontinence because your bladder isn't emptying properly, your health care provider may recommend a catheter for intermittent or constant use. The catheter is a tube that is inserted into the urethra to collect urine. It connects to an external bag that needs to be periodically emptied. ■

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