

# Urinary Incontinence

## The Causes



Urinary incontinence is leaking of urine that you can't control. There are different types of incontinence, including:

- **stress incontinence** – when urine leaks out at times when your bladder is under pressure; for example, when you cough or laugh
- **urge incontinence** – when urine leaks as you feel a sudden, intense urge to pass urine, or soon afterwards
- **overflow incontinence** (chronic urinary retention) – when you're unable to fully empty your bladder, which causes frequent leaking
- **total incontinence** – when your bladder can't store any urine at all, which causes you to pass urine constantly or have frequent leaking

It's also possible to have a mixture of both stress and urge urinary incontinence. It can be caused by several temporary or persistent conditions. Here is a list of factors that can contribute to experiencing urinary incontinence:

**Ageing** as we age, bladder muscles tend to weaken and the bladder has a lower capacity. However, urinary incontinence can be caused by several specific conditions commonly associated with ageing. These could include:

- **Menopause** which usually occurs in women aged between 48 and 55 years
- **Hysterectomy** is a major operation involving womb removal, it can cause damage to the bladder.

**Constipation**, a full bowel can press on a bladder causing urge incontinence or can block the flow of urine, causing overflow incontinence.

**Consuming diuretics** such as some types of antidepressants and blood pressure lowering medication. Alcohol is a diuretic and caffeine is also considered one.

**Enlarged prostate** presses against the urethra causing weakness to the bladder wall.

**Pregnancy** causes undue pressure on the bladder, similarly weakening bladder muscles. **Childbirth** cannot only damage muscles around the bladder, but also damage bladder nerves. This in turn drops the pelvic floor, leading to incontinence.

**Surgery**, treatment for some cancers can weaken the nerves around the bladder and cause incontinence.

**Urinary Tract Infections** irritate the bladder causing the urge to urinate.

In a few cases, urinary incontinence may also be a symptom of a life-threatening health condition, including:

- **Neurological Disorders**, like Parkinson's or brain tumours, these are diseases that affect the brain and spine and may affect bladder control
- **Obesity**, a common cause of incontinence as it puts undue pressure on the bladder, pushing urine against the bladder walls, weakening them over time.

If you suspect any of these conditions may be the cause of your urinary incontinence, contact your GP immediately. In cases of urinary incontinence caused by obesity, pregnancy or childbirth, your GP can establish an exercise regime that not only improves physical fitness, but also specifically builds bladder muscles. A common exercise used for this purpose is the Kegel exercise.

The sooner you can seek help for incontinence the quicker you can get back to living life to the full.

The Urology Foundation is committed to finding better treatments and hopefully a cure for incontinence and other urological conditions through dedicated urology research and professional training and education. Find out how you could help in the fight against urology disease visit our website at [theurologyfoundation.org](http://theurologyfoundation.org)

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