

Understanding Urinary Incontinence



Urinary incontinence is a common condition that affects millions of people worldwide, so it is important we have open conversations about what it is and how to deal with it—without embarrassment. While incontinence can affect men and women, it is much more common in women.

What is incontinence?

Urinary incontinence happens when you lose control of your bladder. As a result, you may experience only minor leakages or your bladder emptying completely. Your condition may be temporary or chronic, depending on its cause.

Types of incontinence

Different types of incontinence have different symptoms. Urge incontinence is urinary leakage associated with bladder spasms. This means you experience leakage with a sense of urgency to get to the restroom and, possibly, don't make it to the restroom in time. Stress incontinence happens when the urethra—the tube you urinate through—is unable to keep urine in the bladder. You may experience leakage while laughing, coughing, running, and jumping. If you don't completely empty out your bladder when you urinate, you may experience "dribbling" or overflow incontinence where the remaining urine from your bladder will leak, or dribble, out.

Causes of incontinence

There are many causes of urinary incontinence. For women, we look at several key factors:

- Aging. Over time, your bladder muscles may weaken.
- Damage. If the muscles that support your bladder become injured or damaged, this may lead to incontinence. Damage can be caused by major events such as surgery and childbirth.
- Bladder cancer. Sometimes cancer itself and/or its treatments make it harder for you to control your bladder.
- Other conditions. Everything from constipation to different medications to lifestyle habits can lead to incontinence.

Helpful tips to control incontinence

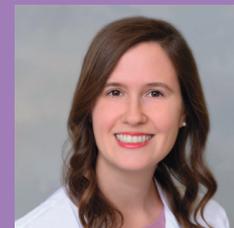
It is important to speak with your doctor about the symptoms you are experiencing to ensure your overall wellbeing and bladder health. There are different ways your provider can identify why you are experiencing incontinence and how best to treat it. Here are a few general tips to help you along your journey:

- Don't run to the restroom with an urge. Instead try to suppress the urgency by performing a Kegel contraction. When the urge subsides, walk to the restroom, you will have more success in staying dry.
- Urinate more frequently to avoid the bladder getting full enough to trigger a bladder spasm. A full bladder is more likely to have contractions (spasms) that cause leakage.
- Avoid drinking more than two liters of fluid a day (64 ounces).
- Avoid drinking three hours before bedtime.
- Avoid bladder irritants, such as coffee, spicy foods, citrus, and carbonation.
- Perform a Kegel contraction before coughing or sneezing. Hold the contraction during the sneeze.
- Empty your bladder before exercise.
- Perform 30-60 Kegel exercises a day to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor, which support the bladder.

Act now!

If you're living with incontinence, make an appointment with a urologist today. Even if the underlying cause of your incontinence is not serious, a urologist can help you get to the bottom of your incontinence issues and identify the appropriate treatment—getting you back to your normal life.

Meet Dr. Patricia M. Zahner



Patricia M. Zahner, MD, is a urologist with St. Mary Comprehensive Urologic Specialists. Dr. Zahner received her medical degree from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Jersey Medical School. She completed her internship for general surgery and residency for urologic surgery at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, while going on to complete her fellowship training in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery at Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Zahner specializes in the urological needs of women, including incontinence.

Schedule an Appointment

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