

Stress Incontinence (Female)

Patient Information Leaflet

What is stress incontinence?

Stress incontinence is when urine leaks because there is a sudden extra pressure (stress) on the bladder.

It develops because the pelvic floor muscles are weakened. Urine may leak when you cough, sneeze, laugh, blow your nose, exercise, lift, bend etc. In these situations there is a sudden extra pressure within the abdomen and on the bladder.

Some people can also lose control of their bowel and leak wind or faeces

How common is stress incontinence?

It is more common in older women.
1 in 5 women over 40 have some stress incontinence.

What causes stress incontinence?

Most cases of stress incontinence are due to weakened pelvic floor muscles. The most common reasons for this include;

- Being overweight.
- Repeated heavy lifting.
- Lack of general fitness.
- Long periods of inactivity (due to illness or following surgery).
- Pregnancy.
- After childbirth.
- Frequent straining to empty bowels.
- Menopausal changes.
- A long term cough.

How do I exercise my pelvic floor muscles?

It is difficult to identify the pelvic floor muscles but it is important to exercise them correctly.

- Choose any comfortable position with your knees slightly apart.
- Concentrate on the muscles you would use to stop yourself passing urine and those that stop you passing wind.
- Gradually squeeze and tighten these muscles starting at the back and working forward.
- Don't hold your breath or squeeze your bottom or stomach muscles.

IMPORTANT NOTE

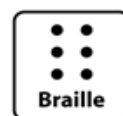
Stopping urine flow midstream should not be attempted as it can cause problems with normal bladder function

Slow exercise - Gradually tighten the muscles and hold for as long as you can. (Aim for 10 seconds).

Fast exercise - Tighten and relax the muscles quickly (up to 10 times).

Try doing these exercises after emptying your bladder or link them to a regular daily activity. You should find the exercises get easier as your muscles get stronger.

If you are still having problems it may be advisable to seek professional help. There are specialist continence physiotherapists, nurses and advisors.



**If you require a special edition of
this leaflet**

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