**Overview**

Incontinence is the inability to control urination. It is not a disease, but rather a symptom that can be caused by a wide range of conditions, such as diabetes, stroke and nerve diseases. Weak pelvic floor muscles or an overactive bladder muscle may also cause leakage. Treatment options can often improve or cure incontinence.

**Symptom**

- Inability to control urination

**Facts to Know**

Millions of Americans suffer from urinary incontinence. It can occur at any age and in both genders, but is most common among older women.

Many women with incontinence never discuss it with their health care professionals. In most cases, treatment can improve or cure incontinence, once the condition is brought to the attention of a health care professional.

Incontinence has a variety of causes. Urine leakage can be caused by problems that, when treated, stop the incontinence, including urinary tract infections, bladder irritations and constipation. Incontinence also can be the result of a serious illness or disease, such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer’s, stroke or brain tumors. Long-term incontinence can be caused by weak pelvic, bladder or urinary sphincter muscles or a bladder that contracts involuntarily and expels urine.

Stress incontinence is the most common form of incontinence among younger women. It consists of urine leakage when any physical pressure is placed on the bladder, such as sneezing, coughing or exercising. Another common type of urine control problem in women is urge incontinence, characterized by a sudden, strong urge to urinate but an inability to make it to the toilet in time. It can be caused by a disorder known as “overactive bladder.” Women can have a combination of these problems, known as mixed incontinence.

Overflow incontinence, which is the feeling that the bladder is always full, accompanied by dribbling of urine, is rare in women. It can be caused by diabetes, all neurologic diseases or an obstruction in the urinary tract that can lead to serious illness.

With treatment, incontinence can be improved or cured in eight out of 10 cases. Treatment depends on the type of incontinence and its causes. Treatments include behavior modification, surgical techniques, use of special devices and medication.

Behavior modification techniques are often the first-line treatment for incontinence. Pelvic muscle exercises, known as Kegel exercises, strengthen weak muscles that support the urinary system.

Absorbent pads and adult diapers are generally recommended by health care professionals for use while undergoing other treatments or for long-term use in conjunction with other treatments—not as the only option available.

**Want to learn more about incontinence?**
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