



Bladder Health

Bladder-control difficulties are common among women after menopause. In fact, 10 to 30 percent of post-menopausal women experience some form of urinary incontinence, often during exercise, or with laughing or sneezing.

While you may feel embarrassed to discuss bladder control issues with your health-care provider, urinary incontinence is completely normal and treatable. Addressing bladder control issues is important: corrective options can help you avoid longer-term health problems such as frequent urinary tract and/or vaginal infections, and vaginal bleeding.

Types of incontinence

Three types of incontinence can occur: **urge** incontinence (when the bladder fails to store urine); **stress** incontinence (when the urethra, the valve that closes the bladder, fails); or **mixed** incontinence (when urge and stress incontinence happen at the same time).

Treatment options

Many women experience bladder control issues as they age. There are a variety of solutions available to help manage these problems. Pelvic Kegel exercises (those commonly recommended after childbirth to prevent moments of urine leakage) help strengthen your urinary tract. Mechanical devices such as a pessary also offer support.

Lifestyle changes such as weight loss, quitting smoking and reducing caffeine consumption can also be very effective. Small changes to your daily routine such as drinking less water or other beverages and making more regular visits to the ladies' room can help, too. In some cases, hormone therapy or permanent surgical intervention are options to consider. Your health-care provider can help you determine which solution is best for you.

Urinary tract infections

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is a sign of imbalance in the body. When women age the

hormone levels in their body decrease, often affecting the tissues, muscles, glands and functions of the vagina and urinary tract. UTIs are not necessarily more common during perimenopause or menopause, but they may be related to other physical changes to the vagina and urinary tract. Chronic UTIs can lead to more serious problems. Women should consult their health-care providers about treatment options.

Talking to your health-care provider

Discussing bladder control issues can be hard for some women. It may be helpful to make a list of concerns and ask the most important and difficult questions first. Take notes during your conversation with your health-care provider; ask for clarification on anything you don't understand. Bringing information you've gathered about your symptoms can make it easier to talk about the issues. If you don't feel able to discuss the subject, write down your concerns for your health-care provider. Be sure to give your health-care provider all relevant information including your history with the condition, symptoms, lifestyle factors, and a list of medications you are taking.

Additional resources

The Canadian Continence Foundation
<http://www.continence-fdn.ca>

Women's Bladder Health
<http://www.womensbladderhealth.com>

The SOGC has developed a collection of information materials for women with menopause-related concerns, however your health-care provider remains the best front-line resource to answer your questions.

Visit www.menopauseandu.ca for more information about menopause and other women's health issues.