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Urinary Incontinence

Also called: Bladder control problems

What is urinary incontinence (UI)?

Urinary incontinence (UI) is the loss of bladder control, or being unable to control urination. It is a common condition. It can range from being a minor problem to something that greatly affects your daily life. In any case, it can get better with proper treatment.

What are the types of urinary incontinence (UI)?

There are several different types of UI. Each type has different symptoms and causes:

- **Stress incontinence** happens when stress or pressure on your bladder causes you to leak urine. This could be due to coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting something heavy, or physical activity. Causes include weak pelvic floor muscles [<https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicfloordisorders.html>] and the bladder being out of its normal position.
- **Urge, or urgency, incontinence** happens when you have a strong urge (need) to urinate, and some urine leaks out before you can make it to the toilet. It is often related to an overactive bladder [<https://medlineplus.gov/overactivebladder.html>] . Urge incontinence is most common in older people. It can sometimes be a sign of a urinary tract infection (UTI) [<https://medlineplus.gov/urinarytractinfections.html>] . It can also happen in some neurological conditions [<https://medlineplus.gov/neurologicdiseases.html>] , such as multiple sclerosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/multiplesclerosis.html>] and spinal cord injuries [<https://medlineplus.gov/spinalcordinjuries.html>] .
- **Overflow incontinence** happens when your bladder doesn't empty all the way. This causes too much urine to stay in your bladder. Your bladder gets too full, and you leak urine. This form of UI is most common in men. Some of the causes include tumors, kidney stones [<https://medlineplus.gov/kidneystones.html>] , diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetes.html>] , and certain medicines.
- **Functional incontinence** happens when a physical or mental disability [<https://medlineplus.gov/disabilities.html>] , trouble speaking [<https://medlineplus.gov/speechandcommunicationdisorders.html>] , or some other problem keeps you from getting to the toilet in time. For example, someone with arthritis may have trouble unbuttoning his or her pants, or a person with Alzheimer's disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/alzheimersdisease.html>] may not realize they need to plan to use the toilet.
- **Mixed incontinence** means that you have more than one type of incontinence. It's usually a combination of stress and urge incontinence.
- **Transient incontinence** is urine leakage that is caused by a temporary (transient) situation such as an infection or new medicine. Once the cause is removed, the incontinence goes away.
- **Bedwetting** refers to urine leakage during sleep. This is most common in children, but adults can also have it.
 - Bedwetting is normal for many children. It is more common in boys. Bedwetting is often not considered a health problem, especially when it runs in the family. But if it still happens often at age 5 and older, it may be because of a bladder control problem. This problem could be caused by slow physical development, an illness, making too much urine at night, or another problem. Sometimes there is more than one cause.
 - In adults, the causes include some medicines, caffeine [<https://medlineplus.gov/caffeine.html>] , and alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>] . It can also be caused by certain health problems, such as diabetes insipidus [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetesinsipidus.html>] , a urinary tract infection (UTI), kidney stones, enlarged prostate [<https://medlineplus.gov/enlargedprostatebph.html>] (BPH), and sleep apnea [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepapnea.html>] .

Who is at risk for urinary incontinence (UI)?

In adults, you are at higher risk of developing UI if you:

- Are female, especially after going through pregnancy, childbirth, and/or menopause
- Are older. As you age, your urinary tract muscles weaken, making it harder to hold in urine.
- Are a man with prostate problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/prostatediseases.html>]
- Have certain health problems, such as diabetes, obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>] , or long-lasting constipation [<https://medlineplus.gov/constipation.html>]
- Are a smoker
- Have a birth defect [<https://medlineplus.gov/birthdefects.html>] that affects the structure of your urinary tract

In children, bedwetting is more common in younger children, boys, and those whose parents wet the bed when they were children.

How is urinary incontinence (UI) diagnosed?

Your health care provider may use many tools to make a diagnosis:

- A medical history, which includes asking about your symptoms. Your provider may ask you to keep a bladder diary for a few days before your appointment. The bladder diary includes how much and when you drink liquids, when and how much you urinate, and whether you leak urine.
- A physical exam, which can include a rectal exam. Women may also get a pelvic exam.
- Urine [<https://medlineplus.gov/urinalysis.html>] and/or blood tests
- Bladder function tests
- Imaging tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/diagnosticimaging.html>]

What are the treatments for urinary incontinence (UI)?

Treatment depends on the type and cause of your UI. You may need a combination of treatments. Your provider may first suggest self-care treatments, including:

- **Lifestyle changes** to reduce leaks:
 - Drinking the right amount of liquid at the right time
 - Being physically active
 - Staying at a healthy weight
 - Avoiding constipation
 - Not smoking
- **Bladder training.** This involves urinating according to a schedule. Your provider makes a schedule from you, based on information from your bladder diary. After you adjust to the schedule, you gradually wait a little longer between trips to the bathroom. This can help stretch your bladder so it can hold more urine.
- **Doing exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.** Strong pelvic floor muscles hold in urine better than weak muscles. The strengthening exercises are called Kegel exercises. They involve tightening and relaxing the muscles that control urine flow.

If these treatments do not work, your provider may suggest other options such as:

- **Medicines**, which can be used to
 - Relax the bladder muscles, to help prevent bladder spasms
 - Block nerve signals that cause urinary frequency and urgency
 - In men, shrink the prostate and improve urine flow
- **Medical devices**, including
 - A catheter, which is a tube to carry urine out of the body. You might use one a few times a day or all the time.
 - For women, a ring or a tampon-like device inserted into the vagina. The device pushes up against your urethra to help decrease leaks.
- **Bulking agents**, which are injected into the bladder neck and urethra tissues to thicken them. This helps close your bladder opening so you have less leaking.

- **Electrical nerve stimulation**, which involves changing your bladder's reflexes using pulses of electricity
- **Surgery** to support the bladder in its normal position. This may be done with a sling that is attached to the pubic bone.

NIH: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

Start Here

- Bladder Control Problems (Urinary Incontinence) [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/urologic-diseases/bladder-control-problems>]  (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-urologicas/problemas-control-vejiga-incontinencia-urinaria>]
- Urinary Tract Health [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/urinary>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
- What is Urinary Incontinence? [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/urinary-incontinence/?adfree=true>]
(American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/incontinencia-urinaria-es/?adfree=true>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Cystoscopy and Ureteroscopy [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests/cystoscopy-ureteroscopy>]
 (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/pruebas-diagnosticas/cistoscopia-ureteroscopia>]
- Daily Bladder Diary [https://www.niddk.nih.gov/-/media/Files/Urologic-Diseases/diary_508.pdf]
 (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases) - **PDF**
- Urinary Tract Imaging [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests/urinary-tract-imaging>]
 (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/pruebas-diagnosticas/imagen-vias-urinarias>]
- Urodynamic Testing [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diagnostic-tests/urodynamic-testing>]
 (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/pruebas-diagnosticas/pruebas-urodinamicas>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Bladder Control: Medications for Urinary Problems [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/in-depth/bladder-control-problems/ART-20044220?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/in-depth/bladder-control-problems/art-20044220?p=1>]
- Bladder Training for Urinary Incontinence [<https://familydoctor.org/bladder-training-urinary-incontinence/?adfree=true>]
(American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/entrenamiento-de-la-vejiga-para-la-incontinencia-urinaria/?adfree=true>]
- Surgery for Stress Urinary Incontinence [<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/surgery-for-stress-urinary-incontinence>]
(American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
- Surgery for Stress Urinary Incontinence in Women [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/in-depth/urinary-incontinence-surgery/ART-20046858?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/in-depth/urinary-incontinence-surgery/ART-20046858?p=1>]

Living With

- Bladder Control: Lifestyle Strategies Ease Problems [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/in-depth/bladder-control-problem/ART-20046597?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/in-depth/bladder-control-problem/art-20046597?p=1>]

Specifics

- Adult Bed-Wetting: A Concern? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/expert-answers/adult-bed-wetting/FAQ-20058456?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/urinary-incontinence/expert-answers/adult-bed-wetting/faq-20058456?p=1>]
- Stress Incontinence [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/stress-incontinence/symptoms-causes/syc-20355727?DSECTION=all&p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/stress-incontinence/symptoms-causes/syc-20355727?DSECTION=all&p=1>]

Images

- Bladder and urethral repair - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100002_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100002_1.htm]
- Inflatable artificial sphincter - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100115_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100115_1.htm]

Videos and Tutorials

- Bladder function - neurological control [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/anatomyvideos/000009.htm>]  (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/anatomyvideos/000009.htm>]

Test Your Knowledge

- Urinary Incontinence Quiz [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/003142_39.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/003142_94.htm]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Bedwetting [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22bedwetting%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Urinary Incontinence [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Urinary+Incontinence%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Urinary Incontinence, Stress [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Urinary+Incontinence,+Stress%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

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- Article: Factors Influencing Help-Seeking Behavior in Patients with Urinary Incontinence: A Single-Center... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40731837>]
- Urinary Incontinence -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Urinary+Incontinence%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+OR+%22Enuresis%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

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Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-urologicas/aparato-urinario-funciona>]

Find an Expert

- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov>] 

Children

- Bedwetting [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/enuresis.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/enuresis.html>]
- Bladder Control Problems and Bedwetting in Children [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/urologic-diseases/bladder-control-problems-bedwetting-children>]
 **Easy-to-Read** (National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-urologicas/problemas-control-vejiga-enuresis-ninos>]
- Products for Children with Enuresis and Daytime Urinary Incontinence [<https://www.kidney.org/products-children-enuresis-and-daytime-urinary-incontinence>] (National Kidney Foundation)

Men

- Kegel Exercises for Men: Understand the Benefits [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/mens-health/in-depth/kegel-exercises-for-men/art-20045074?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/mens-health/in-depth/kegel-exercises-for-men/art-20045074?p=1>]

Women

- Cystocele (Prolapsed Bladder) [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/urologic-diseases/cystocele>]
 (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-urologicas/cistocele>]
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Also in Spanish [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/informacion-de-la-salud/enfermedades-urologicas/ejercicios-kegel>]
- Lifestyle & Behavioral Changes [<https://www.voicesforpf.org/about/treatments/lifestyle-behavioral-changes/>]
(American Urogynecologic Society)
- Urinary Incontinence [<https://womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/urinary-incontinence>]
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)
- Vaginal Pessary [<https://familydoctor.org/vaginal-pessary/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/pesario-vaginal/?adfree=true>]

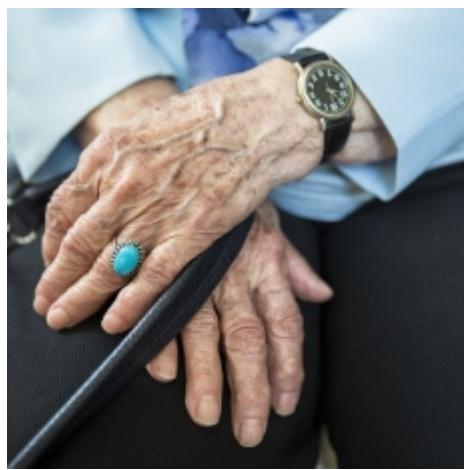
Older Adults

- Eldercare at Home: Incontinence [<https://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/urinary-incontinence>]
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- Urinary Incontinence in Older Adults [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/bladder-health-and-incontinence/urinary-incontinence-older-adults>]
 (National Institute on Aging)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/incontinencia/incontinencia-urinaria>]

Patient Handouts

- Artificial urinary sphincter [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003983.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003983.htm>]
- Bedwetting [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000703.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000703.htm>]
- External incontinence devices [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003974.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
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- Indwelling catheter care [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000140.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
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- Urinary incontinence surgery - female - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000134.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000134.htm>]
- Urine drainage bags [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000142.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
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MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

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[Urine drainage bags](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000142.htm) [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000142.htm]

Related Health Topics

Overactive Bladder [<https://medlineplus.gov/overactivebladder.html>]

Pelvic Floor Disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicfloordisorders.html>]

Urinary Tract Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/urinarytractinfections.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Urinary Incontinence* is the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases [<https://www.niddk.nih.gov>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/urinaryincontinence.html>] on *Urinary Incontinence*

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