

Psst!

Plan to Stay in Shape Today



BLADDER LEAKS



BREAKING THE TABOO!



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT AND BREAK THE TABOO!

The bladder and urinary system are a vital part of our bodies. We all need to eliminate waste and excess water through urine. As children we learned to control this complex system of muscles, nerves, and sphincters that allows us to decide when we need to empty our bladder. But this system can malfunction for different reasons, leading to involuntary bladder leaks. Frequent leaks of a significant amount of urine are known as urinary incontinence. All men and women may have bladder control problems at some point in their lives.

It should come as no surprise that urinary incontinence is a taboo topic. Although it's common, most people are too embarrassed to talk about it. This guide is designed to help you understand how your bladder works and why leaks can sometimes happen. You'll find tips and tricks to help maintain your quality of life and avoid surprises caused by a leaky bladder! We decided to **break the taboo** so you can learn more about this condition, which is treatable in most cases and can even be cured!

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DID YOU KNOW?

Some 3.6 million Canadians live with urinary incontinence.



THE BLADDER AND ITS PLUMBING SYSTEM

When we eat and drink, our body absorbs the liquids it needs to function. The kidneys use a complex mechanism to filter waste and excess liquids, which are evacuated as urine. Urine is then stored in the bladder, which serves as a holding tank. Urine exits the body via a small tube called the urethra.

Muscles, nerves, and sphincters work together to control the bladder and its plumbing system. The muscles and ligaments in the **pelvic floor** support the bladder and urethra. Encircling this small tube is a **sphincter**, which work like faucets. When our nerves signal the urge to go, the brain sends a message that we need to pee.

Luckily, we have a few minutes to get to the bathroom. When the time is right, we send a signal to turn on one of the faucet (sphincter) in order to empty the bladder. At the same time, the detrusor muscle in the bladder wall contracts to help expel urine from the body. Muscles and nerves work closely together to keep urine in the bladder and then release it at the right time.

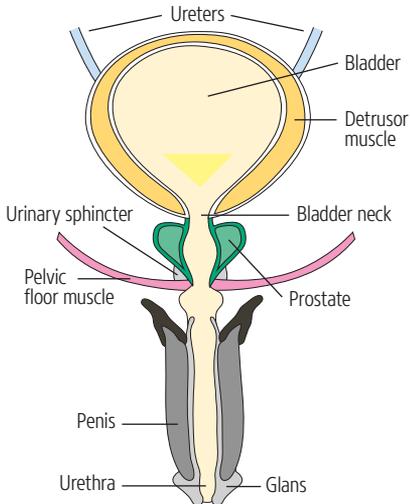


DID YOU KNOW?

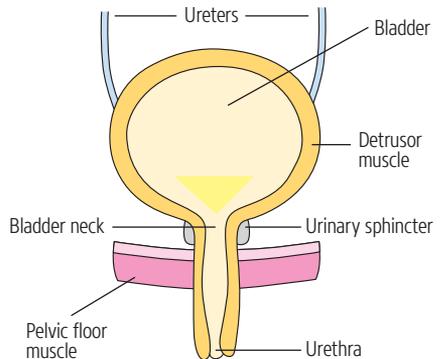


- A full bladder holds **450 ml** of urine (almost two cups).
- The brain sends a signal once the bladder is about **half full** (250 ml).
- A healthy, young adult bladder has a maximum capacity of **500 to 600 ml**.
- The amount of urine our bladders can hold **decreases with age**.

THE MALE URINARY SYSTEM



THE FEMALE URINARY SYSTEM



LEAKING FAUCETS

As mentioned above, the bladder and its plumbing system are controlled by a complex machine made up of nerves, muscles, and sphincters. If one part of the machine weakens or fails, a leak can occur. For example:

- If the bladder muscle suddenly contracts or the sphincter muscle is not strong enough to retain the urine, a leak can occur.
- If the nerves that carry signals from the brain to the bladder malfunction, a leak can occur.
- And if the pelvic floor muscles and ligaments are damaged or weakened, the bladder, urethra, and sphincter won't be supported properly and, again, a leak can occur.

MYTH: Only women experience bladder leaks.

FACT: Because of their anatomy, men are less likely to experience incontinence. But it can still happen.



Urinary incontinence is defined as involuntary loss of urine, or bladder leakage. When the bladder leaks, it may empty itself completely or just leak small amounts of urine at a time. It is important to know that incontinence is not a disease as such. Rather, it is a consequence of other health issues. Despite what many people think, urinary incontinence can happen at any age, and has a variety of possible causes.

There are several types of bladder leakage:

1. STRESS INCONTINENCE

This is when a small amount of urine leaks when you laugh, cough, sneeze, exercise, or lift a heavy object. It is more common in women mainly because pregnancy and childbirth can weaken the tone and strength of the pelvic floor muscles.



GOOD NEWS!

About 96% of women with stress incontinence can be cured.* **DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT IT!**

* Source: <https://fr.poise.com/i18n/advice-and-support/expert-answers/article/bladder-leakage-myths.html>



2. URGE INCONTINENCE

This is when you have frequent and sudden urges to pee, and urine leaks before you have time to get to a bathroom. The amount that leaks can be small to significant.

3. OVERFLOW INCONTINENCE

This is when there is an obstruction in the bladder that makes it become enlarged. In such cases, the bladder gets too full and exceeds its storage capacity. With overflow incontinence, there is a steady and constant flow of urine. What's more, you may feel that you can't empty your bladder completely, however hard you try. Overflow incontinence is more common in men.

4. FUNCTIONAL INCONTINENCE

This is when you are unable to get to the bathroom in time. The bladder is in good working order but mobility is impaired to due a physical or cognitive issue. Examples of cognitive impairment are people with dementia or who are confused and cannot get to a bathroom. An example of physical impairment is limited mobility resulting from a hip injury.



5. MIXED INCONTINENCE

As the name suggests, mixed incontinence is a combination of two or more of the types listed above.



DID YOU KNOW?

A frequent and urgent need to pee is called hyperactive bladder syndrome.

Unlike urinary incontinence, this condition does not necessary involve bladder leaks.

On the other hand, more than half of those who have bladder leaks also have a hyperactive bladder.



MYTH: Incontinence is a normal part of aging.

FACT: Aging can cause a variety of changes that affect how the bladder works. However, getting older does not necessarily mean you will start to experience bladder leaks. Incontinence happens at any age! The table below shows the percentage of women affected by age group. It's more common than you think!

Age group	% of women with urinary incontinence
18 to 40	15% to 30%
41 to 64	30% to 40%
65 and over	50% to 55%

Source: Québec Pharmacie, *Mise à jour du traitement de l'incontinence urinaire.*

If you're experiencing bladder leakage, no matter what kind, it's important to talk about it with your healthcare professionals. As you'll see, there are various ways to minimize or even eliminate the problem. It's especially important to see a doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Blood in your urine
- Recurring urinary tract infections
- Incontinence that starts suddenly in your older years
- Difficulty peeing and emptying your bladder completely



RISK FACTORS FOR URINARY INCONTINENCE

As with most health conditions, certain factors can raise your risk of urinary incontinence.

1 **Certain foods, drinks, or medications can have a diuretic effect, meaning they make the kidneys expel more liquid and make you pee more often:**

- Coffee, tea, chocolate, cola, and alcohol. These also irritate the bladder.



DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT IT!

Certain medications can cause bladder leaks. If this happens, ask your pharmacist for advice.



2 **Certain conditions increase pressure on the bladder and the surrounding muscles and sphincters. The pressure is too much for the sphincters, which let urine leak out. The most common of these conditions are:**

- **Obesity:** excess weight can put pressure on the bladder and the surrounding muscles.
- **Constipation:** a build-up of stools in the intestine puts pressure on the bladder.
- **Pregnancy:** the fetus puts pressure on the bladder, causing urine to leak.

3 **Certain lifestyles can increase the risk of urinary incontinence:**

- Low levels of physical activity
- Smoking
- An unhealthy diet
- Not drinking enough liquid or drinking too much

GOOD NEWS! Fortunately, you can improve your living habits by leading a more active lifestyle, giving up smoking, and eating healthy foods! You'll significantly lower your risk of bladder leaks and your overall quality of life will also improve!

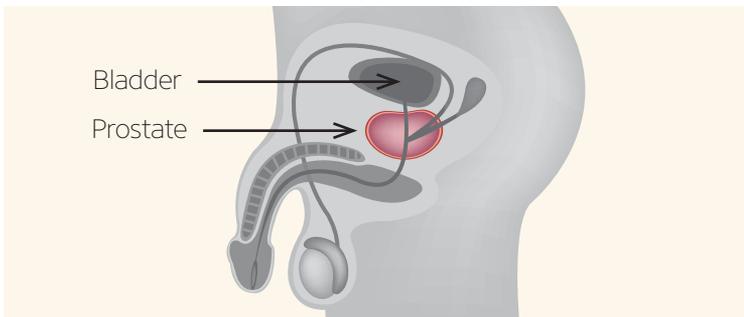


4 Being female:

- As mentioned before, pregnancy and childbirth can weaken the pelvic floor muscles that support the bladder and its plumbing system. During menopause, a decrease in female hormones makes the skin in the vagina and urethra thinner. In addition, the sphincter that seals the urethra loses muscle tone. These changes lead to a higher risk of bladder leaks.

5 Being male:

- Prostate disorders are the leading cause of incontinence in men. The prostate is a small gland in the pelvis. It surrounds the urethra leading from the bladder to the penis. The prostate tends to get bigger with age. Almost all men over 70 have a naturally enlarged prostate, a condition known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (or hypertrophy). It is important to remember that benign prostatic hyperplasia does not increase your risk of prostate cancer.



However, the bigger the prostate gets, the higher the risk of increased pressure on the bladder and urethra, which can cause bladder leaks and other symptoms such as:

- Peeing more often, usually at night
- Peeing one drop at a time
- Difficulty peeing
- A slow or thin stream of urine
- A flow of urine that stops and starts
- Being unable to empty your bladder completely
- Blood in your urine

IMPORTANT!

If you have any of these symptoms, you should discuss the situation with your doctor. He or she will do some tests and prescribe the right treatment for you.



6 Other potential risk factors:

- Age, but remember: Although age is a risk factor, bladder leaks are not caused by natural changes in the body that occur with normal aging.
- Playing contact sports or lifting heavy objects can cause bladder leaks.
- A loss of dexterity or manual agility can sometimes make it harder to get to the bathroom on time.
- Certain chronic diseases like diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease can affect bladder function.

MYTH: If you have bladder leaks you should significantly reduce your fluid intake.

FACT: CAUTION! If you drink less, your urine may become more concentrated. This can irritate your bladder, making it more active. On the other hand, drinking too much can also lead to a dilated bladder and a greater need to pee. The best thing you can do is drink normally to satisfy your thirst.





WHEN YOUR PIPES LEAK AT NIGHT!

You might think that only children wet the bed. What if we told you bed wetting, or nighttime incontinence, is still a problem for about 1% of adults? Nighttime incontinence is when you experience bladder leaks in your sleep. There are two types:

1. PRIMARY NIGHTTIME INCONTINENCE:

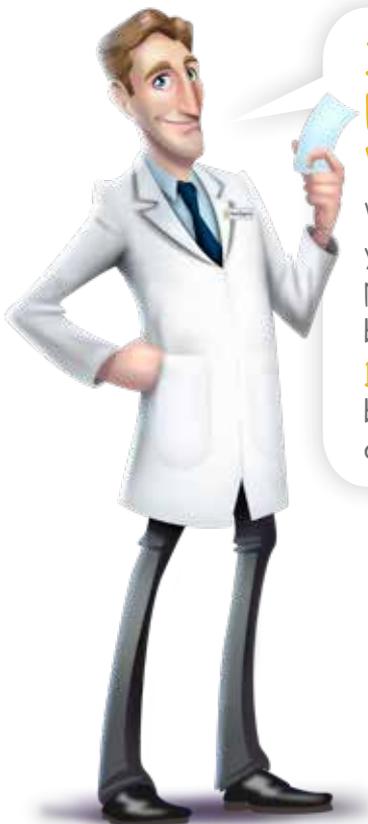
This is when you have nighttime incontinence as a child and the problem continues into adulthood. Possible causes include:

- Problems with the hormone controlling urine production
- Physical causes (like a small bladder)
- Psychological causes or family history



2. SECONDARY NIGHTTIME INCONTINENCE:

This is when your bladder has been working normally, but you suddenly start experiencing bladder leakage at night. If this happens, it's important to talk to your doctor right away. In all likelihood something triggered this new condition. Talking things over with your healthcare professionals will help them pinpoint the cause and find a solution.



DON'T CONFUSE NIGHTTIME INCONTINENCE WITH NOCTURIA:

With nighttime incontinence,
your bladder leaks!

Nocturia is when you have to get out of
bed to pee more than once at night.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT IT,
because nocturia is a condition requiring
a medical referral!



CONSEQUENCES OF BLADDER LEAKS

Bladder leakage can have serious negative impacts at the physical, social, and psychological level. The condition is highly embarrassing, not only because of telltale signs on clothing, but also because of the unmistakable and unpleasant odour of urine. If bladder leaks are left untreated, the skin around the genitals remains in contact with urine, resulting in a higher risk of rashes and lesions. Bladder leak can also lead to a urinary tract infection.

But the negative impacts aren't just physical. Bladder issues can affect all areas of your life, particularly your social and sex life. Women, for example, can sometimes experience bladder leaks during sex. The embarrassment this causes may make them reluctant to engage in further sexual activity.

Bladder leakage can also be a major concern for people when organizing their social lives. They often end up making plans based on their condition:

- Where's the nearest bathroom?
- Will this involve a long drive?
- Does this activity involve jumping?
- Will I be able to hold it in if I start laughing?

When a person's ability to enjoy everyday activities is affected, the repercussions can be severe.

For older people, the effects can also be devastating. They may feel guilty, ashamed, and humiliated. Some may withdraw to avoid the embarrassment related to their condition. Others may become emotionally indifferent or lose their motivation.



DID YOU KNOW?

For all the reasons mentioned, bladder leaks can even lead to depression.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT IT!



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The first step in the fight against bladder leaks is mustering the courage to talk about it. Once you break the taboo it'll be easier to seek help from health professionals and your loved ones. In this section we'll show you that there are many solutions to this delicate problem. The appropriate treatment or solution will depend on the type of incontinence.

First of all, here are a few basic tips for reducing the risk of bladder leaks:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Quit smoking
- Stay active
- Avoid foods and drinks that irritate the bladder
- Empty your bladder every three to four hours during the day and right before bed
- Prevent constipation by eating lots of fibre and avoid straining when you have a bowel movement.



Kegel exercises

Developed by and named after gynecologist Arnold Kegel, these exercises strengthen the all-important **pelvic floor** muscles. When these muscles are strong, they provide good bladder support and keep the urethra tightly closed. Although Kegel exercises mainly help with mixed or stress incontinence, they can be done as a preventive measure that's beneficial to men and women alike.

How to do Kegel exercises

1. IDENTIFY YOUR PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

Your pelvic floor muscles are the ones you use when you pee or empty your bowels. If you can stop the flow of urine, you've identified the right muscles. Other ways you can identify your pelvic floor muscles:

- Women: If you place your finger inside your vagina when doing Kegel exercises, you'll feel a slight pressure on your finger.
- Men: When you contract your pelvic floor muscles, your penis and scrotum will lift up slightly.

2. DOING THE EXERCISES:

IMPORTANT: To avoid the risk of a urinary infection, DO NOT do these exercises while you pee.

- Contract your muscles for five to ten seconds and breathe normally.
- Release your muscles for about ten seconds.
- Repeat, 12 to 20 times, three to five times a day.



One of the benefits of Kegels is that you can do them anywhere, any time! Do them while you're stopped at a traffic light, in the checkout line at the grocery store, watching a movie, or even while you're reading this guide!

BE PATIENT

Do your Kegels regularly! It may take a number of weeks or even **two to four months** before you see an improvement. Pelvic floor muscles are just like your other muscles—you need to put them to work regularly to see a difference.





Vaginal cones for stress incontinence

Vaginal cones help retrain your pelvic floor. They come in a set of different sizes and weights and are placed in the vagina where they are supported by the pelvic floor muscles. The cones are designed to make it easier to exercise these muscles. They also help you track your progress.

The idea is to strengthen the muscles, just as you would with weights and dumbbells. Place a cone in the vagina and use your muscles to keep it in place while going about your daily routine. The cones are part of an exercise program. Once you can keep a cone in place effortlessly for 15 minutes, move on to the next weight. Before you start, talk to your health professional to find out if this program is right for you.



DID YOU KNOW?

The pelvic floor muscles also surround the male and female sexual organs. Good news: Strong pelvic floor muscles improve your sex life.



Retraining your bladder

Changing the frequency of your bathroom visits can help significantly reduce bladder leaks, especially if you have **urge** incontinence. With this type of incontinence, there is a frequent and sudden urge to pee.

The goal of retraining your bladder is to space out the number of times you go to the bathroom. Your body will learn that the bladder is capable of holding urine for longer. You can pee every two to three hours during the day.



Here are some tips before you start:

- Only pee when you feel the need.
- Don't pee "just in case." Doing so reduces your bladder's capacity. (Note that this tip doesn't apply at bedtime or if you are going on a long trip.)
- Take your time and empty your bladder completely, without straining.

Here are a few tips on how to train yourself to space out your bathroom visits:

- Before you go, practice holding it in for at least a minute by contracting the pelvic muscles. Over time, gradually extend the amount of time you wait before peeing to 15 minutes.
- Do this each time you feel the need to pee during the day.

Have a strong urge to pee? You can control the urge and even make it go away:

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles several times in a row.
- Take time to relax. Breathe deeply.



- 
- Focus your mind on other things by doing some mental exercises. Sing a song, or recite the alphabet backwards. By taking your mind off the urge to pee, you may even find it has disappeared!
 - Once the urge has passed, calmly make your way to the bathroom if you need to. Otherwise, continue with what you were doing.

You can develop a program for retraining your bladder at the same time as doing Kegels to exercise your pelvic floor muscles. Keep in mind that it will take a number of weeks to see an improvement, so don't give up! Consider starting these exercises at home because you may experience some bladder leaks while doing them at first.

IMPORTANT!

These tips are not intended to replace advice from a health professional. Consult your doctor, nurse, or physical therapist to decide if this regime is right for you.



Incontinence protection

MYTH: Sanitary pads, incontinence pads—it's all the same!

FACT: Incontinence pads are specially designed to absorb and hold urine. They are half the size of sanitary pads and just as absorbent, so they're more discreet. They also do a much better job. For all these reasons, incontinence pads are the best products to use.



Urine has a characteristic odour and flows quickly, like water. Incontinence pads and/or underwear are made with materials that effectively absorb urine. What's more, they prevent the odour of ammonia associated with urine.

These products are also designed to keep urine away from the skin once it has been absorbed, increasing comfort and reducing the risk of skin irritation.

There are many different types of incontinence protection. You can choose from:

- Different sizes
- Different styles
- Different levels of absorption
- Different shapes for men and women

As we saw above, there are several types of incontinence. What's more, everyone is different, with their own particular lifestyle. The good news is that all these different types of incontinence protection, there's a product for every person and situation. Whether you play a contact sport, are going on a long trip, or need everyday protection, there's a product that will work for you.



DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT IT!

Products sold in drugstores are good quality, and pharmacy staff will help you decide what you need!



Medication

Medication is another way to reduce bladder leaks. In some cases, your doctor may prescribe treatment to control your incontinence.

There are several different types of drugs to treat this condition. The most common ones are known as anticholinergics. Keep in mind that you may experience side effects, which can include:

- Dry mouth
- Constipation
- Blurry vision
- And more...

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor or pharmacist. You should also talk to your health professionals if you are taking these medications but they don't seem to be working. As there are several different types of treatment for incontinence, they can help you find something else that is more appropriate and effective for you.

To get the relief you need, don't be afraid to talk about it!





Medical devices and surgery

By “medical devices” we mean pessaries and catheters.

- **Pessaries** hold a woman’s organs in place. They help the pelvic floor support the bladder and the uterus. Made of silicone or rubber, pessaries are inserted in the vagina by a doctor or a nurse. They limit how far the bladder drops down and control urinary incontinence. Although pessaries don’t need to be taken out when you go the bathroom, they do need to be cleaned regularly.
- **Catheters** are used if you are unable to empty your bladder completely. A catheter is a flexible tube inserted in the urethra to drain the bladder. A permanent catheter is a last resort.



In some cases, if the solutions suggested have not worked your doctor may recommend surgery, especially if you have stress incontinence. To learn more about surgical solutions, talk to your healthcare professionals!

DID YOU KNOW?

Doctors who specialize in the bladder and urinary system are called urologists. For more advanced solutions such as surgery, you will most likely be treated by a specialist.



CONCLUSION

The bladder and its plumbing system form a complex set of muscles, nerves, and sphincters. Certain malfunctions in the system can lead to bladder leakage ranging from minor to significant. Bladder leakage is very embarrassing, so most people don't like to talk about it. But remember—once you know the cause of urinary incontinence, you can take action and, in some cases, even eliminate it completely.



**THE FIRST STEP
IS TO TALK ABOUT IT!**

Don't be afraid
to consult your
health professionals!



Sources and useful links:

Familiprix

www.familiprix.com

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<http://www.canadiancontinence.ca>

The bladder retraining program:

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Health Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/medical-information/seniors-aging-bladder-control-problems-incontinence.html>

Other:

<http://www.tena.ca/>

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