

How can Physical Therapy treat Urinary Incontinence?

Because many symptoms of urinary incontinence are caused by pelvic floor muscle weakness and dysfunction, a specially trained Women's Health Physical Therapist is the ideal provider to help you gain control over your symptoms. (Many treat men with urinary incontinence as well). **Physical Therapists use their specialized medical training to completely evaluate and design a treatment program that is individualized for each patient.**

Physical Therapy can:

- Give you control over your life and your bladder
- Save money and embarrassment by allowing less use of pads and undergarments
- Reduce use of medications for incontinence
- Possibly prevent the need for surgery

Physical Therapy Treatment may include

- Education on diet and nutrition to avoid food and drinks that may irritate the bladder
- Advice on how to change behaviors that make symptoms worse
- Techniques to help you find the right muscles and learn to use them correctly
- Exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles
- Exercises to stretch and strengthen other important muscles
- Ways to decrease urinary urge and frequency
- Biofeedback that shows you how your muscles are working
- Electrical stimulation to improve awareness and strength of the muscles

HOW DO I FIND A PHYSICAL THERAPIST

For more information on Women's Health Physical Therapists who treat urinary incontinence, visit the website of the Section on Women's Health of the American Physical Therapy Association. Click on the "Consumers" link to locate a Women's Health Physical Therapist **OR** visit the website of the American Physical Therapy Association, at www.APTA.org Click on Find a PT at the top of the page. Enter your zip code, and under the "Expertise" space, type in or choose "Women's Health."

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For more information about how Physical Therapists can help with women's health conditions please contact the Section on Women's Health of the American Physical Therapy Association at:

Website: www.womenshealthapta.org

Telephone: (800) 999-APTA extension 3229

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TAKE CONTROL OF URINARY INCONTINENCE WITH PHYSICAL THERAPY



REAL LIFE WITH URINARY INCONTINENCE

STRESS INCONTINENCE

The aerobics class is fun for Lisa until the music gets faster and she picks up the pace. She's thankful that she remembered to put a thin menstrual pad on before class because when the activity requires more exertion, she starts to lose small amounts of urine. Lisa suffers from **stress incontinence**.

Stress incontinence is leakage of small amounts of urine when there is increased pressure on the bladder. This can happen with exercise, like for Lisa, or with sneezing, coughing, lifting or other activities. Stress incontinence usually results from weakness and lack of support in the muscles of the pelvic floor. These are the muscles that attach to the bottom of the pelvic bones and run front to back, forming a bowl-like structure that lifts to support the internal organs and controls the sphincter muscles. The pelvic floor muscles also work to strengthen the low back, stabilize the pelvic bones, and help with sexual function.

Women with stress incontinence often have "under active" pelvic floor muscles. **Physical therapy treatment** involves activating and strengthening these important muscles.

Causes of under active pelvic floor muscles include:

- Pregnancy and Childbirth
- Injury or trauma
- Surgery in the vagina or rectum
- Episiotomy (during childbirth)
- Lack of exercise and lack of use

URGE INCONTINENCE

Before leaving the office, Anna stops to use the restroom. She pulls into her driveway after finally getting out of the rush hour traffic. She pulls the keys out of the ignition and has an urgent need to empty her bladder before she can reach the front door. Some days she makes it all the way into the house before she loses a large amount of urine. Some days she doesn't. Anna has **urge incontinence**.

Urge incontinence is the leakage of medium to large amounts of urine when a person feels a sudden strong urge to urinate. **Physical therapy treatment** involves improving control and awareness of the pelvic floor muscles, as well as activating and strengthening them.

Why a Physical Therapist



Some of the possible causes of urge incontinence are:

- Poor sensation and not being aware that the bladder is full
- Neurologic problems such as stroke
- Enlarged prostate in men
- Malfunction of the bladder

MIXED INCONTINENCE

Melissa is having dinner with friends. She has an urge to urinate, but decides to wait until the conversation pauses. Her friend tells a funny story and Melissa laughs... and leaks urine. Melissa has **mixed incontinence**.

Mixed Incontinence includes symptoms of both stress and urge incontinence.

Possible causes can include any combination of the causes of stress and urge incontinence. Treatment also needs to address both contributions.

FUNCTIONAL INCONTINENCE

Nancy has arthritis in both knees. She has a lot of pain whenever she first stands up after sitting for awhile. She waits as long as possible, and when she finally gets up to go to the bathroom, she leaks some urine because it takes too long to get to the toilet. Nancy is dealing with **functional incontinence**.

Functional Incontinence is urine leakage that occurs when a person can not get to the toilet in time. **Physical therapy treatment** for functional incontinence involves improving mobility, and learning ways to plan for bladder control.

Causes include:

- Joint pain or muscle weakness
- Problems with mobility
- Confusion, dementia or delirium
- Environmental barriers (i.e., the bathroom is too far away, use of a walker or cane, too many obstacles to navigate around)
- Psychological problems such as depression or anger

Physical Therapists are healthcare experts in evaluating and treating the muscles, joints, and the movement of the human body. Urinary incontinence is just one of the many things that can happen because of weak muscles or dysfunction through the pelvis.

Even though urinary incontinence is common, it is NOT a normal part of aging or normal consequence of childbirth. With appropriate Physical Therapy treatment you can return to the activities you enjoy and live the life you want!