

Many have experienced the embarrassment of *incontinence*, loss of bladder control. It may come on suddenly, or, with increasing frequency over time. It is usually associated with aging, however, incontinence is more often the result of a medical problem. Weak pelvic muscles, an enlarged prostate gland, an overactive bladder, and certain medications may all contribute to the problem, as can, urinary tract or vaginal infections, diabetes, and severe constipation. In addition, debilitating diseases, such as multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease, may cause spinal nerve damage, and consequently, incontinence.

There are remedies to correct or control incontinence. Determining the cause is the first step. Your doctor or health care practitioner can analyze your symptoms, test your blood and urine, and possibly do other tests to determine how much urine your bladder can hold, how it empties, if any blockages exist and whether the bladder empties completely when you urinate. The solutions range from simple exercise to surgery.

Pelvic muscles, when contracted, help to stop the flow of urine. If you squeeze and hold these muscles, you are performing a "Kegel" exercise. Repeating this exercise several times in succession, everyday, may strengthen the pelvic muscles and may help you to "hold it" longer. Relaxation techniques to resist the urge to urinate can be practiced with the hope of eventually being able to urinate less frequently. By keeping a record of your usual patterns of urinating, you can eventually learn to "time" your voidings to prevent leakage. Becoming more aware of the signals your body is sending, also helps. This method is called biofeedback.

Certain medications may be effective in decreasing irritability of the bladder, or in relaxing smooth muscles of the urinary tract and prostate. Vaginal estrogen may be helpful for some. If a urinary tract or vaginal infection is the cause, curing the infection should also, cure the incontinence. Injectable implants placed in the urethra, have also been used, but eventually need to be repeated.

Surgical procedures may be necessary when the problem is a blockage, an enlarged prostate, or a change in the position of the bladder.

When all else fails, better, highly absorbent incontinence products are now available and can be worn easily under clothing.

Don't suffer in silence if you have incontinence. Tell your doctor. Today there are many possible solutions.

