Talk to your doctor

Some people are reluctant to discuss a topic as personal as urinary incontinence with their doctor. Millions of people have problems with bladder control, and millions have been treated successfully. Your doctor can help. Here are some questions to help you begin the conversation with your physician.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

■ Do you ever accidentally leak urine, either during the day or while sleeping?
■ Do you leak urine when you sneeze, cough or laugh, or when you're exercising or lifting something heavy?
■ Do you avoid physical activities because you're afraid of accidental leakage?
■ Do you ever have an immediate, overwhelming urge to urinate, but are unable to get to the restroom in time?
■ Has there been a noticeable change in how frequently you feel the need to urinate?
■ Do you feel a constant need to urinate or have difficulty emptying your bladder completely?
■ Do you frequently have to get up at night to use the restroom?
■ Do you use the restroom more than eight times in a 24-hour period?
■ Does the frequent need to urinate interfere with your daily activities?
■ Do you factor in the availability and location of restrooms when you are planning trips or outings?

If you answered “Yes” to any of these questions, you could be suffering from urinary incontinence. Share your answers with your doctor, who will help determine the best treatment for you.

Physical therapy can help

Urinary incontinence affects millions of people and can be a socially embarrassing and emotionally disruptive condition. In many cases, physical therapy can help manage and even completely alleviate the problem.
What is incontinence?

Urinary incontinence, the loss of bladder control, is a common problem. It affects people of all ages and is more common in women than men. Experts estimate 25 million adult Americans suffer from some form of urinary incontinence, and 75 to 80% of those are women. Researchers estimate one in four women over the age of 18 experience some form of urinary incontinence. In most cases urinary incontinence is treatable, and physical therapy can often help a patient regain bladder control.

Urinary incontinence can range in severity. The most common type is stress incontinence, which is the involuntary loss of a small amount of urine when coughing, sneezing, exercising or straining to lift heavy objects. A sudden, uncontrollable need to urinate, which often results in the loss of a large amount of urine when the sufferer can’t reach the toilet in time, is known as urge incontinence.

What causes incontinence?

Many different factors can contribute to urinary incontinence. It can be a side effect of medication, the symptom of an easily treatable medical condition, or it may be the result of pelvic floor dysfunction, a condition that occurs when the muscles of the pelvic floor weaken and/or shorten.

The cause of pelvic floor dysfunction may be associated with but not limited to:

- hormonal changes
- trauma
- hip surgery
- C-section
- hysterectomy
- episiotomy
- laparoscopy
- pregnancy
- obesity
- diabetes
- stroke
- Parkinson’s disease
- multiple sclerosis
- enlarged prostate and prostate cancer
- strenuous activity

Physical therapy is an option

The goal of physical therapy is to help the patient retrain the body and regain control of the bladder. Physical therapy offers a non-surgical alternative for the management of urinary incontinence, and may also be used as a complement to surgical intervention and pharmacological management.

Treatment options available through physical therapy include:

- comprehensive evaluation
- patient education
- therapeutic ultrasound
- biofeedback
- EMG biofeedback training
- electrical stimulation
- manual therapy
- therapeutic exercise
- bladder training
- pelvic floor muscle reeducation

Many patients find therapeutic exercises and bladder training are very successful in treating stress and urge incontinence. For those who have trouble with the exercises, biofeedback can help visualize and correctly recruit your muscles. If your muscles are too weak to perform the exercises correctly, electrical stimulation can help the pelvic muscles contract, strengthening the muscles so the patient can correctly perform the exercises.

In order to participate in physical therapy, a patient must be screened and referred by their physician (OB/Gyn, family practice, urologist), nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. Ask your doctor if physical therapy is a possible treatment for your urinary incontinence.