

# A SELF-HELP TOOL FOR WOMEN MANAGING URINARY LEAKAGE



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**Do you leak urine when you do not want to?**

If so, you are not alone. Urine leakage (urinary incontinence) is a common problem for women. *Up to 50% of women have urine leakage.*

Urine leakage can happen when you cough or sneeze. This is called stress incontinence.

You can also have a sudden urge to pass urine and not be able to reach the toilet before leaking urine. This is called urge incontinence.

*Urine leakage is not just a part of getting older. You do not have to live with it. There are factors that can worsen your urine leakage. This tool will help you to change some of these factors.*

**THE FIRST THING TO DO** is to track how often you are leaking urine. Use a piece of paper or note pad to keep track of your urine leakage before and after you change a factor. This is called a bladder diary. In the diary you will want to record the following each day:

<b>Time</b>	<b>Accidentally leaked urine</b>	<b>Used toilet</b>
6-8 am		
8-10 am		
10-12 am		
12 am –2 pm		
2-4 pm		
4-6 pm		
6-8 pm		
8-10 pm		
10 pm –12 am		
12-2 am		
2-4 am		
4-6 am		

In each time slot make a check mark each time you leak urine or use the toilet. You should complete a diary for 3-5 days before you change a factor. Then complete a diary for 3-5 days after making the change. This will let you to see if the change helped your urinary symptoms.

**THE NEXT THING TO DO** is to look over the factors listed below. Decide which factors you want to try and change. This tool will give you some ideas of how to make changes. Try to change only one factor at a time. This will help you keep track of what changes helped. You can change the factors in any order you wish. If changing a factor improves your urine leakage carry on with this change, even if you go on to change other factors:

## **Factor 1: *Pelvic Floor Muscle Strength***

Pelvic floor muscles hold your bladder, uterus and bowels in place. They can become weak after having a baby or because of a lack of exercise. They can also become weak as you get older. With weak pelvic floor muscles you may leak urine. Exercising these muscles regularly may improve your urine leakage. You may need to exercise these muscles for 1-2 months before you notice a change.

First you need to learn how to find these muscles. Try to squeeze the muscles that prevent you from emptying your bladder. Try not to tighten your buttocks or stomach muscles. Do not hold your breathe.

To do pelvic floor exercises (or Kegals) follow these steps:

- 1) Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles
- 2) Hold and count slowly...1 and 2 and 3
- 3) Then relax for...1 and 2 and 3
  - \* Do not hold your breathe
  - \* **10 exercises** are called **1 set**
  - \* Do 1 set **5 times a day**
  - \* If you can not squeeze your muscles for a count of 3 start by only counting to 2
  - \* As you get better you can count up to 5 and then relax for a count of 5
  - \* You must relax your muscles for the same amount of time as you squeeze them
  - \* You can do the exercises when standing, sitting, or laying down

Use a bladder diary to track your urine leakage before and after you start doing these exercises. It may take 1-2 months before you notice a change. If your urine leakage improves, try to keep doing the exercises regularly.

## **Factor 2: *Caffeine***

Caffeinated drinks and food include: coffee, regular tea, cola, and chocolate.

Even 1 cup of coffee or tea may have too much caffeine for your bladder. Caffeine is a diuretic. It can increase the amount of urine you make. This can make you urinate more often or leak urine.

Try to reduce or remove drinks with caffeine for 2 weeks. You may find that decaffeinated coffee or tea is a good option. To track your urine symptoms before and after you make this change use a bladder diary. Continue this change if the amount of urine you leak decreases.

### **Factor 3: Body Weight**

Urine leakage is more likely to happen at a higher weight. If you are overweight, trying to lose weight may improve your urine leakage. Weight loss is best done by changing your diet and exercising.

Canada's Food Guide (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>) gives ways to eat healthy. To lose weight you should continue to eat regular meals but eat smaller amounts. You will want to eat a variety of foods. The Canada Food Guide suggests that each day you eat: 6 servings of grains, 7 servings of vegetables and fruits, 3 servings of milk and milk products, and 2 servings of meat and/or meat alternatives.

The Canadian Physical Activity Guide for Healthy Active Living (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/index-home-accueil-eng.php>) gives ways to exercise. Walking is a type of exercise.

You may find that you leak urine when exercising. Try to empty your bladder before exercising. You may also want to wear pads during exercise.

You may find your urine leakage improves even with the loss of a few pounds. Use a bladder diary to track your urine symptoms before and after you start a weight loss plan.

#### **Factor 4: Constipation**

Constipation can worsen urine leakage. Having a large amount of stool in your bowels can make it hard to fully empty your bladder when you use the toilet. Trying to maintain a bowel routine may help your urine leakage. Try using the toilet on a regular consistent basis each day.

Unless told differently by a doctor, drink a total of 6-8 glasses (1 1/2 – 2 liters) of caffeine-free fluids per day. This includes soups and the milk in your cereal.

Eating more fiber may help. Fibre is in fruits and vegetables and in whole grain breads and cereals. The recommended daily fibre intake is 25 to 30 grams. The amount of fiber you eat each day should be increased over a period of time.

As you make these changes keep track of how it affects your symptoms. You can use a bladder diary to track you symptoms. Continue this change if the amount of urine you leak decreases.

Your doctor may be able to help you further. Some laxatives that may help include polyethylene glycol, psyllium and lactulose. You should talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

If being constipated is a change from your usual bowel habits you should speak to your doctor. A change in your bowel habits may be the result of a serious medical condition.

### **Factor 5: *Vision and hearing problems***

Vision and hearing problems can make urine leakage worse. Problems with vision and hearing can make it hard to safely get to a toilet in time. If you have problems with your vision and/or hearing, you should consider getting your eyes and/or hearing tested. You may also want to make a few changes in your home. Remove objects that might be blocking your pathway to the toilet.

Consider placing nightlights to light the path to the toilet at night. As we get older we produce more urine at night. This is a normal part of aging. It relates to changes in body make-up and how water is managed by the body. Try and avoid drinking fluids in the evening and night. This may help decrease the need to get up to the bathroom at night when it is dark.

As you make these changes keep track of how it affects your symptoms. You can use a bladder diary to track you symptoms. Continue this change if the amount of urine you leak decreases.

### **Factor 6: *Smoking***

Cigarette smoking can cause urine leakage. Quitting smoking may improve your urine leakage and your health. There are several tools that can help you quit smoking. These include drugs and nicotine gums and patches. Speak to your doctor about ways to stop smoking.



### **Other Factors:**

There are other factors that may be related to your urine leakage. If you have any of the following you should speak to your doctor:

- 1) Pain with urinating
- 2) Blood in the urine
- 3) Feeling that you have not completely emptied your bladder after urinating
- 4) Continuous leakage of urine
- 5) Decreased sensation of urinating
- 6) Repeated urinary infections
- 7) Diabetes
- 8) Stroke
- 9) High blood pressure
- 10) Back problems and/or arthritis
- 11) Memory problems
- 12) Parkinson's disease
- 13) Multiple sclerosis
- 14) Spinal cord injury
- 15) Previous surgery or radiation in the pelvic area
- 16) Fecal incontinence or stool leakage
- 17) Difficulty walking or with other daily activities