

Managing Urinary Incontinence After Pregnancy: Tips and Support



Highlights

Urinary incontinence refers to the involuntary loss of urine from the bladder. It can range from a small leak to complete loss of bladder control. Treatments and strategies are available to help improve or even cure urinary incontinence. Seeking help early is recommended.

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What is Urinary Incontinence?

Urinary incontinence refers to the involuntary loss of urine from the bladder.

It can vary from a small leak to complete loss of bladder control. There are treatments and strategies available to help improve or even cure urinary incontinence. Seeking help early is recommended.

Causes of Urinary Incontinence

The combination of hormones and stretched muscles can weaken the muscles that control your bladder, leading to accidental urine leakage. During pregnancy, hormones relax the muscles and tissues that support the bladder, bowel, and uterus, collectively known as the pelvic floor. As your baby moves down the birth canal during delivery, the pelvic floor stretches and remains stretched for a period of time.

Frequency of Urinary Incontinence

Leaking urine after childbirth is common, with 1 in 3 women experiencing leakage at some point. Stress incontinence occurs when women leak urine during activities like laughing, sneezing, coughing, or exercising.

Factors that increase the likelihood of developing stress incontinence after birth include:

Pre-existing bladder or bowel problems

Having your first baby

Having a large baby

A long labor, especially during the second stage

Difficult delivery involving stitches, tearing, or the use of instruments

Women who have a cesarean section can also develop bladder problems. Cesareans reduce the risk of severe incontinence for the first baby but may not offer the same benefits after multiple cesareans.

When Should I See a Doctor?

Most women find that urine leakage improves within the first few weeks as muscles and tissues recover. For some women, pelvic floor recovery may take months, while others find it doesn't fully recover. If you experience urine leakage, speak to your doctor, nurse, or women's physiotherapist. Early

intervention can reduce the risk of long-term problems.

How is Urinary Incontinence Treated?

Treatment varies depending on the type and severity of incontinence. Initially, pelvic floor recovery requires rest and care, including ice for the perineal area in the first few days. Gentle pelvic floor contractions can help in the recovery process. Gradually increase hold times as recovery progresses.

Lifestyle changes, such as managing weight, eating fiber, and drinking more water, may also help. If the condition persists, your doctor may refer you to a specialist. Long-term treatments may include exercises, medications, or surgery.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

Pelvic floor muscles can be exercised and strengthened like any other muscles. Doing these exercises before, during, and after pregnancy helps prevent urinary incontinence.

Example exercise:

Breathe in and out. Tighten the pelvic floor muscles as if you're stopping yourself from urinating. Hold for 10 seconds while breathing normally, then relax. Repeat this 10 times, and do it 3 times a day.

Bladder Training

During pregnancy, pressure from the growing baby can cause more frequent bathroom trips. After birth, retraining the bladder can help. Try to delay going to the toilet until your bladder is fuller to help retrain it.

Medication

If you have urge incontinence or an overactive bladder, medication may help relax the bladder muscles.

Surgery

If other treatments don't work, surgery may be an option. Consult your doctor for advice on the best treatment.

Emotional Wellbeing

Urinary incontinence can affect both physical and emotional health. For some women, it may be associated with birth trauma. If you experience low mood or anxiety, support services are available.

Managing Life with Urinary Incontinence

If urinary incontinence becomes long-term, consider these tips:

Use incontinence pads instead of sanitary pads.

Carry a change of underwear or clothes when going out.

Use apps to locate nearby toilets.

Cross your legs when sneezing or laughing.

Modify your exercise routine to avoid high-impact activities like jumping.

How to Prevent Bladder Problems After Birth

Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid daily, avoiding drinks with sugar or caffeine.

Eat a high-fiber diet, including fruits, vegetables, and cereals.

Maintain a healthy weight.

Quit smoking.

Exercise for at least 30 minutes most days.

Do regular pelvic floor exercises.

Avoid constipation, and use proper toilet posture.

Don't go to the toilet "just in case."

See a doctor immediately if you have a urinary tract infection.

Exercise Safely During Pregnancy and After Birth

Ideal exercises include walking, low-impact aerobics, water aerobics, cycling, swimming, light weight training, and pregnancy classes. Avoid activities that strain the pelvic floor, such as:

Heavy weights

High-impact or jerky movements

Bouncing, contact sports, or excessive twisting

Exercises involving sudden direction changes or excessive pressure on one leg

Tools And Assistance

1. Pelvic Floor Exercises

Pelvic floor exercises (Kegels) can strengthen muscles supporting your bladder and reduce leaks. Many physiotherapists offer specialized programs.

2. Incontinence Products

Incontinence pads and underwear provide comfort and manage leaks. They come in various sizes and absorbencies.

3. Bladder Training Apps

Mobile apps can track your bathroom habits and help with bladder training, reminding you when to go and gradually increasing the time between trips.

4. Support Groups

Support groups provide a space to connect with others dealing with urinary incontinence, offering shared experiences and emotional support.

5. Physiotherapy

A women's physiotherapist can guide you through pelvic floor exercises, bladder training, and other treatments tailored to your needs.

6. Medications

For overactive bladder or urge incontinence, medications can help relax the bladder muscles. Consult your doctor for recommendations.

7. Educational Resources

Printed and digital materials provide useful information on managing incontinence, treatment options, and lifestyle changes.

8. Medical Devices

Devices like vaginal pessaries or electrical stimulation units may be used under medical guidance to help manage symptoms.

9. Surgical Options

If necessary, surgical procedures can help manage severe incontinence. Discuss options with your doctor.