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Living with Urinary Incontinence

The underlined terms are listed in the glossary.

Urinary incontinence can be an embarrassing and isolating condition that affects your physical and psychological health. Although it is not life-threatening, it usually has a negative impact on your quality of life. Incontinence can affect your social life, your work, and your sex life. It causes physical and emotional discomfort, and can lead to low self-esteem.

Urinary incontinence can make you feel powerless. Having unwanted urine leakage in a public place can be upsetting and embarrassing. This could lead to fear of leaving the house, and a sense of isolation which prevents you and your loved ones from fully enjoying life.

There are many causes of incontinence. Some can be cured, and others can be managed. Social attitudes to urinary incontinence can make it difficult to talk about it, even to your closest friends. Looking for professional help can take your mind off your situation, and allow you to better cope with the condition.

How can I get help?

There are specialist doctors and nurses who can help you with your incontinence problem. Health care

professionals are there to help you find a solution to your urinary incontinence problem. Do not be afraid to ask for their help.

How can I deal with incontinence in my daily life?

General lifestyle changes can help manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life. Follow the advice of your doctor or nurse.

Try to make sure you always know where the nearest toilet is. Never be afraid or embarrassed to ask where the toilet is when you are away from home.

Plan to empty your bladder every 2 to 4 hours and before going to bed at night. Install a night-light and grab bars in your bathroom to help prevent falls when you are in a hurry.

There are many products to help contain urine leakage, such as pads, drip collectors, and external collection devices. Discuss with your doctor or nurse which type of continence product best fits your lifestyle needs.

There are many absorbent pads available to help you manage urine loss. There are different products for men and women. Most products are no bulkier than normal underwear, and you can wear them easily under everyday clothes. Absorbent incontinence pads are different from menstrual pads, ask if you are unsure about which product to use. Regularly change your pad to keep the groin area clean and as dry as possible. This will help prevent skin irritation and control odour. Pads are generally available at pharmacies, supermarkets, and medical supply stores. Men who have problems with dribbles of urine can use a drip collector, or a small pad. Drip collectors are worn over the penis and held in place by your underwear. Men also have the option to wear an external adhesive device over the penis, attached to a leg bag and worn under the trousers.

How can I deal with incontinence at work?

It can be stressful to have to work when you worry about your incontinence. There are certain things you can do to make you feel more in control and worry less:

- Make sure you always have plenty good-quality pads at work
- Invest in odour preventers. Ask your pharmacist or doctor about these
- Wear your favourite perfume. It will not prevent the odour, but you will feel better
- Avoid drinking too much during working hours
- Avoid caffeinated drinks



Useful link

Read more about continence products, such as different types of pads, at the Continence Product Advisor website:

<http://www.continenceproductadvisor.org/>

- If you are in a meeting, only take sips of water rather than cups of coffee or tea
- Try to use the toilet before you feel your bladder is full. Standing up with a full bladder may cause urine leakage
- Try to use the toilet every 3 or 4 hours
- Wear dark coloured clothes. Lighter-coloured clothes may show stains more easily
- Have an extra set of clothes at work
- If recommended by your doctor, try to do your pelvic floor exercises during work hours (See the leaflet *Self-management of Urinary*)

How can I deal with incontinence while travelling?

Travelling, especially long distances, can be difficult when you suffer from urinary incontinence. To make travel more comfortable you can:

- Try to pre-book a seat near a toilet on trains and planes
- When travelling by car, plan toilet breaks throughout the trip
- Try sitting on cushions to prevent vibrations
- Avoid drinking too much, especially coffee, alcohol, and tea, right before and during travel
- Wear loose clothes for comfort
- Wear protective pads if necessary

How does urinary incontinence affect my sex life?

It can be difficult to feel attractive and confident when you do not always feel in control of your body. Fear of having urine leakage during sex can lead to avoiding being intimate. Low self-esteem, depression, or anxiety related to incontinence can also affect your sex life. Communication is essential. Otherwise you may be deprived of affection and nurturing when you need it most. Discuss your wishes and needs with

your partner. You could also consider attending a local support group to get help and support with any difficulties that you are experiencing.

How does a catheter affect my daily life?

Life can be miserable when your bladder stops working properly. It may sometimes be necessary to have a catheter in order to prevent urine leakage. You can be taught how to insert an intermittent catheter to empty your bladder every couple of hours. In other cases, it may be necessary to have an indwelling catheter in place. Read practical tips about work and travel in the sections above.

Having a catheter does not mean you cannot be sexually active. Both men and women can have sex with a urinary catheter in place. For men, the tubing can be bent backwards and folded next to the penis, and a condom could be applied to keep it in place. For women, the tubing can be taped to the thigh out of the way. Make sure the tube is not blocked.

This information was updated in November 2014.

This leaflet is part of EAU Patient Information on Urinary Incontinence. It contains general information about diagnosis and assessment of the condition and available treatment options. If you have any specific questions about your individual medical situation you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider. No leaflet can replace a personal conversation with your doctor.

This information was produced by the European Association of Urology (EAU) in collaboration with the EAU Section of Female and Functional Urology (ESFFU), and the European Association of Urology Nurses (EAUN).

The content of this leaflet is in line with the EAU Guidelines.

You can find this and other information on urological diseases at our website: <http://patients.uroweb.org>

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