

Bladder Leakage & Other FAQs for Women

Incontinence is defined as "the involuntary leaking of urine, to the extent that it becomes inconvenient." Even the healthiest women can experience one or more types of bladder leakage at different times of life. The extent of leakage, and possible reasons for it, are many and varied, like the individuals who experience it.

TENA believes that knowledge is power and better protection is key. We've compiled the following frequently asked questions to help you learn about incontinence, or what we call the Unexpected Leak™

How common is bladder leakage?

Incontinence is more prevalent in women. In fact, incontinence is just as common as hay fever! Research indicates that one in four women over 35 in the US have experienced incontinence.

How does the bladder work?

When you eat or drink your body absorbs liquids. The kidneys filter waste products from the body fluids and make urine. A continuous trickle passes from the kidneys to the bladder and the bladder slowly expands. When the bladder is full a signal goes to the brain indicating the need to go to the toilet. Once the toilet is reached the brain then tells the large bladder muscle to squeeze and contract. At the same time it tells the support muscles (pelvic floor muscles) that surround the urethra - the outlet from the bladder - to relax and let the urine pass.

How often do most people empty their bladder?

Most people empty their bladders between four to eight times a day.

I'm relatively young and have a weak bladder. Isn't this something that only affects old people?

1 out of 4 women over 35 have weak bladders. Pregnancy and childbirth contribute to this figure. Menopausal women often experience incontinence. Even young girls sometimes experience leaking after strenuous exercise. Heavy smokers cough more frequently than non-smokers and this can exacerbate the situation. Too much coffee, tea or alcohol doesn't help either. So you can see, age is not the only factor.

What can be done about incontinence?

One of the best ways to try to prevent or reduce the number of bladder leakage episodes in otherwise healthy women is to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles by performing the exercises. This tends to be more effective if you have the stress type of incontinence. For other types of incontinence various other methods of treatment are available. Please talk to your doctor about the possibilities for treating incontinence. The treatments described, used in conjunction with TENA® incontinence products for women, will ensure that you can regain your confidence.

Do exercises really help?

Yes, exercises often help, particularly for persons with the stress type of bladder problem. You should consult with your doctor about the type of incontinence you have, and which exercises are best for you. For women, Kegel or pelvic floor exercises can reduce leaks in just 2 to 4 months and may even eliminate them within a year*. They're simple to do, and because no one can tell when you're doing them, you can shape up your muscles anywhere, at any time.

I have read that incontinence can be treated with muscle-training exercises. How long before the exercises start to show results?

Depending on the type of incontinence you have, you may begin to feel the benefit of exercises after just a few weeks, and after 8 to 12 months there is a good chance you will have reduced symptoms or even be symptom-free. Even if you are not symptom-free exercises may improve your situation and, with the right products to help you, you will regain your confidence. The sooner you act, the better! Most people wait so long that it takes the body some time to get back to earlier routines.

If I drink fluid less, will things improve?

No. Drinking less will make your urine more concentrated which will in turn irritate your bladder, causing you to urinate more often. You should drink 6 - 8 glasses a day. However, it is not recommended that you drink excessive amounts either as this could lead to distension of the bladder.

I'm worried that I'll leak during sex. What can I do to avoid this happening?

The good news is that bladder leakage is pretty rare during sex, so there's no reason why you should allow incontinence to affect your sex life. With pelvic floor exercises you may find that your sex life actually improves as your muscles strengthen. If you are worried about leaks, you might want to try and empty your bladder beforehand as well as avoid diuretic drinks such as carbonates and coffee before making love, as this will help reduce the desire to 'go' during love making.

What TENA® product should I use?

All TENA® incontinence products are designed for your comfort and security with a contoured body shape, a soft surface that feels dry all the time, and the all-important Odor Control™. We have a comprehensive range of size and absorbency levels.

Can I use regular sanitary protection pads for incontinence?

No. Unlike ordinary maxi pads, TENA® incontinence products are specially designed to absorb bladder leakage. Urine is light and is discharged in larger quantities; menstrual discharge is heavier and comes out more slowly. Two different conditions requiring two different absorption techniques, two different odor-fighting properties and two different products.

Where can I buy TENA® incontinence products?

You can find TENA® incontinence products at your local Grocery, Drug or Discount store. Look for them in the aisle where other bladder control products are sold.

How do I dispose of my TENA® incontinence pads?

As with maxi pads, you should not throw TENA® incontinence pads in the toilet, but in the garbage or sanitary pad bins. With most TENA® products you can use the plastic wrapping from your new pad to dispose of the old one.

* The site does not offer medical advice and nothing contained in the site is intended to constitute professional advice for medical diagnosis or treatment.

Types of Incontinence in Women

People use a lot of different terms to describe incontinence, including: sensitive bladder, bladder leakage, overactive bladder and urine leaks, and there are a few more medical terms to describe the different types of incontinence in women. At TENA®, we call

incontinence the Unexpected Leak™. The symptoms described below should help you start to identify your type.

Do you leak when coughing, sneezing, laughing or doing heavy lifting?

This is Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI), which is usually shortened to Stress Incontinence. Of the types of incontinence in women, stress incontinence is the most common. It is the most common type of female incontinence. It happens when the pelvic floor muscles that support the bladder have become weakened. Laughing and coughing increase pressure on the bladder, and the pelvic floor muscles are unable to tighten enough to keep all the urine in. There are usually only small amounts, but in some cases it can be more. If you have a small leak or just dribbles, you may want to try Pantiliners & Ultra Thin Pads.

Stress incontinence is more common during pregnancy, after childbirth and after the age of 40, yet it can happen to women of any age. In fact, 1 out of 3 women experiences stress urinary incontinence at some point in their lives, and around 40% of young women experience it when doing sports. Pelvic floor exercises -- also known as Kegel exercises -- can help.

Do you experience sudden urges to urinate?

This is Urge Incontinence, often referred to as an overactive bladder. This is when you experience a sudden urge to urinate and the bladder involuntarily expels urine. There is usually little warning and moderate to large amounts of urine leakage. The average person empties their bladder between 4 and 8 times a day, but if you find that you need to urinate more frequently than you feel is usual for you, even perhaps waking several times during the night on a regular basis, this could be a symptom of Urge Incontinence.

The exact cause of this type of incontinence is not known, but it's thought that the bladder muscles send incorrect signals to the brain indicating that the bladder is fuller than it actually is. In certain cases you can 'train' your bladder not to do this by practicing pelvic floor exercises. Most people manage the symptoms of urge incontinence with protective pads or underwear. TENA's complete line of incontinence products offers discretion and security, so you can minimize the impact of Urge Incontinence and lead a full and active life.

Could you have mixed symptoms?

Some women experience Mixed Incontinence. It will usually be a combination of Stress Incontinence and Urge Incontinence. If you have both types of incontinence you will usually find that one is more prominent than the other. We recommend trying Protective Underwear or Adult Briefs.

Do you have a physical or mental condition that makes it difficult for you to reach the bathroom in time?

Another type of incontinence is the inability to reach the bathroom in time because of the difficulties caused by a physical or mental illness, and this is known as Functional Incontinence. The security and confidence you get from incontinence protection can help make this condition less stressful.

Do you have a neurological illness or brain injury?

Illnesses such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease, Spina Bifida, Multiple Sclerosis or accidental brain damage can interfere with the way the bladder and brain communicate, leading to an inability to control the bladder or empty it completely. These are known as Neurological Bladder Disorders.

If you have not been able to determine your type of incontinence from the information provided here, we advise you to contact a healthcare professional for a personal assessment.

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