



Stress Urinary Incontinence

What You Should Know

Urology Care
FOUNDATION™
*The Official Foundation of the
 American Urological Association*

What is Stress Urinary Incontinence?

Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI) is when urine leaks out of your body. It is caused by sudden pressure on the bladder and urethra. The pressure causes the sphincter muscles to open briefly, which lets unplanned urine to leak. With mild SUI, pressure may be from sudden forceful actions, like dancing, exercise, sneezing, laughing or coughing. More severe SUI is when you leak urine while doing less forceful actions, such as standing up, walking or bending over. SUI can be a few drops of urine or enough to soak through your clothes.

Types of Incontinence

Urinary incontinence is the loss of control over passing urine. There are two main types:

- **Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI)** is when a small to moderate amount of urine is released, without control. This happens when you cough, sneeze or laugh.
- **Urge Urinary Incontinence (UUI) or Overactive Bladder (OAB)** is a sudden, uncontrollable need to pass urine and leaks may be moderate to large.

What Causes SUI?

The most common risk factors for SUI are:

- Gender: females are more likely to get SUI
- Pregnancy and giving birth
- Smoking (which leads to chronic coughing)
- Chronic coughing
- Being overweight

- Pelvic or prostate surgery
- Nerve injuries to the spine or neurologic diseases

How is SUI Treated?

Lifestyle Changes and Products

Making a few changes in your everyday life can help your SUI symptoms. You can lose weight, stop smoking (to help you cough less) and strive for good health. Exercises, bladder training to plan bathroom visits and SUI products may also help.

- **Pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegels)** may strengthen your pelvic floor and help support the bladder and other organs. It is of great value to do Kegels the right way and regularly.
- **Absorbent products** may be used as a quick-fix or long-term choice if leaks are not a major problem in your life. They come in many shapes and forms such as pads or pull-on briefs.
- **Medical devices** are available for men and women. For women with weak pelvic floor muscles, a device may be prescribed or bought over-the-counter, and fitted by your health care provider. Men may use a penile clamp to stop leaks. These clamps are used to limit the flow of urine from the penis.

Drugs

At this time, there are no drugs approved in the United States to treat SUI. If you have both SUI and OAB, your health care provider may advise you to take OAB drugs or treatments. The drugs do not treat SUI, just OAB symptoms.

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Surgical Treatment

If surgery is needed, there are many choices. Learn the risks and benefits of each choice. Also talk to your doctor about what to expect during and after surgery before you decide. Aim to work with a urologist with experience in SUI surgery. Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgeons (FPMRS) are certified in SUI and other pelvic surgery. Some surgeries include:

- **Urethral injections or bulking agents** may be used to “bulk up” the urethra in some women. “Bulking agents” are put into the urethra and bladder sphincter to help the way the sphincter closes the bladder. This treatment may not have long lasting results, so may need to be repeated over time.
- **Slings** can be used for both women and men. But “sling” surgery is a common surgery in women. For women, a strip of soft permanent mesh is placed under the urethra to support urethral closure during actions that involve “physical pelvic stress” (coughing, sneezing, bending, lifting, jumping and running). In men, sling surgery is used to treat those with mild SUI. A soft mesh tape is placed under the urethra through a cut between the scrotum and rectum. It supports the urethra and sphincter muscle by pushing up on the urethra and causing some closure of the urethra to prevent leaks. Sling surgery is not as helpful for men who have had radiation to the prostate or urethra. It is also not a good choice for men with severe incontinence.
- **Bladder neck suspension**, also called retropubic suspension, colposuspension, or Burch suspension. This is not as common as sling surgery. In this surgery, stitches are placed in the tissue along the bladder neck and urethra. The stitches support the urethra and sphincter muscles. This stops them from moving downward and opening by accident.
- **Artificial sphincter** is a treatment for men, though in some cases women may also be helped by this surgery. This surgery places a device with three parts into your body. The device helps close the urethra to stop leaks. It can be a good way for a man to treat his SUI.

How Can I Prevent SUI?

One of the best ways to prevent SUI is to do daily Kegel exercises. These exercises keep your pelvic muscles strong. Striving for a healthy weight with a diet rich in fiber and water (low on alcohol and soda) also helps. Keep in mind how much fluid you drink and plan to pass urine often.

If you’ve had surgery, protect yourself from problems by avoiding activities that strain your belly and pelvis.

About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world’s leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation’s website, UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions or go to UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist to find a doctor near you.

Disclaimer

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

For more information, visit UrologyHealth.org/Download.