



Leaky plumbing? Physical therapy can help you regain bladder control

By Mary Jo Jeffrey, PT, Lincoln Hospital Physical Therapy



As many as 25 million Americans have a secret that keeps them from enjoying everyday activities and makes even the normal act of sneezing something to be feared. That secret is bladder control. Loss of bladder control is highly preventable, and easily reversible for most who read this entire column.

What causes loss of bladder control? Well, for many, intense physical activity such as sports can contribute to incontinence. Giving birth is a very common cause of incontinence affecting even young women in their 20s and 30s. Bladder leakage is often brought on by age, or a physical trauma, a birth defect, surgery or illness.

Bladder control is a function of the pelvic floor muscles, which extend from the pelvic bone to the tailbone. When those muscles are weakened, leakage begins. Incontinence ranges from a few drops of leakage to full-blown "accidents."

Just for the record, there are three common types of incontinence...

- **Stress** -- where leakage occurs during physical activity such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting, or even walking. Leakage occurs when abdominal muscles press against the bladder and the weakened pelvic floor.
- **Urge** – is when there is a strong and frequent need to urinate, making it difficult to get to the bathroom in time, and often sufferers don't.
- **Mixed** – is a combination of both stress and urge incontinence.

Who suffers from bladder leakage? Anyone can. The majority of people with incontinence are women – a full 80 percent of those afflicted. But women are not alone here. Five percent of men 64 and younger are incontinent, while 15 percent of men over 67 years of age experience bladder leakage. **Incontinence is not a normal part of the aging process**, although risk increases as a person ages and muscles weaken. No matter what the cause, the gender or the age, the vast majority of people who suffer with incontinence can benefit from physical therapy.

Many men and women have improved bladder control through **Kegels**, a muscle toning exercise for the pelvic area. The key to Kegels is doing them correctly and consistently. Here at Lincoln Physical Therapy, we have a special program that explains and teaches you these exercises which can be done in fifteen-minute segments twice a day – without interrupting daily activities.

See your doctor or come in and talk to the physical therapist. She will evaluate the type of incontinence and the strength and coordination of the pelvic floor muscles. After that, an individual therapeutic program can be designed for you to get your life back. Significant results are usually obtained in four to six weeks.

Mary Jo Jeffrey is a Registered Physical Therapist at Lincoln Hospital Physical Therapy.