

# STRESS INCONTINENCE

## What is stress incontinence?

Stress incontinence is involuntary release of small amounts urine due to increased abdominal pressure without contracting the bladder muscles. This is usually related to actions such as sneezing, coughing, laughing, lifting something heavy or performing physical exercises.

Stress incontinence can also be due to a decreased closure ability of the urethra (water pipe) due to damaged connective tissue associated either in women after childbirth, in men as a complication of a prostate surgery or in both women and men in neurogenic bladder.

There are some factors which may make it worse:

- Being overweight
- Smoking
- Chronic cough
- Lifting
- Constipation
- Menopause( this is due to the decreasing oestrogen level in the blood, which causes the tissue to become thinner and the contractive ability of the urethra to deteriorate)

## What can I do about it?

- Seek help! Don't be embarrassed- you are not alone. It is estimated that up to 72% of women suffer from urinary incontinence. Half of these women will have symptoms of stress incontinence. Men may develop stress incontinence as a complication of a prostate surgery (2.2% following TURP, up to 10% following open prostatectomy)
- Don't reduce your fluid intake. It will not make your symptoms any better. Remember to drink around 1.5 Litres of fluid every day
- Avoid caffeine (found in tea, coffee, cola, Red Bull,), fizzy drinks and alcohol as these make you go more often. Use de-caffeinated drinks instead
- Do your pelvic floor exercises!

## What are pelvic floor exercises?

These are exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. This training is the initial treatment for stress incontinence and has been shown to be effective!

The pelvic floor muscle is a broad sling of muscles which run from the front to the back of your pelvis, and their functions are:

- To support the pelvic organs (bladder, rectum and womb in women)
- To control the outlet from the pelvic organs (urethra, anus and vagina in women)

### **The basic pelvic floor muscle contraction**

- Try to close and “pull up” the front and back passages at the same time, as if trying to prevent yourself from breaking wind and stopping the flow of urine
- Avoid holding your breath, pulling your tummy, tightening your buttocks and squeezing your thighs together at the same time

Just remember, these exercises are invisible! No one should be able to see you doing them; therefore you can do them while at work, sitting on the bus, waiting in the queue at the supermarket etc.

Once you are confident that you can contract your pelvic floor muscle you should:

- Aim to do 6 sets of pelvic floor muscle exercises a day.
- Each set should consist of slow contractions (for endurance) and fast contractions (for power).

### **Slow contractions:**

1. aim to hold your pelvic floor tightly for a maximum of 10 seconds (you can start at 5 seconds and slowly build up to the maximum)
2. rest for the same number of seconds
3. repeat the slow contractions up to ten times
4. rest for 30 seconds and move on to fast contractions

### **Fast contractions:**

1. squeeze your pelvic floor tightly, and let go immediately
2. repeat the fast contractions up to ten times, making sure you let go completely after each one

**Remember to hold your pelvic floor tightly with every cough, laugh, sneeze etc. to prevent leakage!**

### **For further information please contact:**

Royal Free Continence Nursing Team  
 020 7317 7629  
 The Continence Foundation Help Line  
 0845 345 0165  
 Bladder and Bowel Foundation  
 01536 533255