

This leaflet should only be used by specific individuals along with a physiotherapy assessment. If you have any concerns, please contact your physiotherapist.

Stress incontinence

Information for patients

Stress incontinence

This is when you leak urine (e.g. on coughing, sneezing, and lifting) because the muscles that support your bladder are weak. These are called the pelvic floor muscles.

Do you have any of the following problems?

- Leaking of urine when you cough, laugh or sneeze
- Leaking of urine when you exercise
- A constant small dribble of urine
- Leaking of urine during sex.

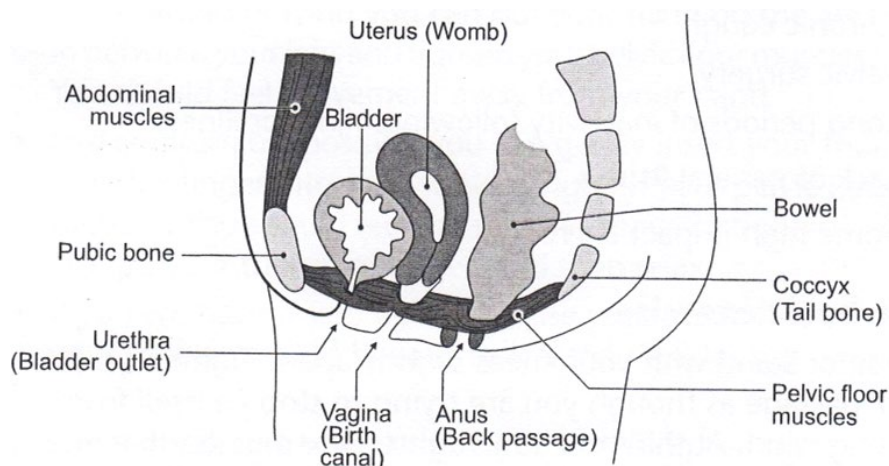
If so, there may be a simple problem with your bladder for which help is available.

You are not alone – many people have this problem.

What causes stress incontinence?

Some reasons why this may happen:

- Family history
- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Chronic constipation
- Being overweight
- Smoking
- Long term cough
- Heavy lifting at work or home
- Menopause
- Pelvic surgery
- Getting older if you do not keep exercising your muscles
- High impact exercise (e.g. running or jumping).



What can I do to help reduce the problem?

- Try to avoid constipation and straining when going to the toilet
- Cut down or try to stop smoking
- Try to keep a healthy weight
- Try to avoid heavy lifting where you can
- If you have a cough which causes you a problem, speak to your doctor

- Slowly reduce your caffeine and fizzy drink intake. Things like coffee, tea, cola, irn-bru and fizzy water can irritate your bladder
- Try to drink 1½-2 litres a day – avoid drinking large amounts at once, rather little and often throughout the day
- Don't go to the toilet “just in case”
- Most importantly, do your pelvic floor exercises.

Pelvic floor exercises

Try to do your pelvic floor exercises in different positions e.g. lying, sitting, and standing and in positions where you leak.

1. Gently squeeze and pull up your pelvic floor muscles.
Hold for _____ seconds (max 10). Repeat _____ times (max 10).
2. Gently squeeze and pull up your pelvic floor muscles, just for a second before relaxing
Try to do _____ (max 10).

Do these 2 exercises _____ times per day (max 5).

Tips to help you with your exercises

- Do your exercises at the same time of day. For example, link them to household tasks or mealtimes
- Pull up your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can immediately before you do something that makes you leak, e.g. when coughing
- See your physiotherapist regularly to help you with your exercises.
- You may find the ‘NHS Squeezy’ app helpful – <https://squeezyapp.com/>



This leaflet was compiled by the Lothian Continence Network Group. Ref: Lothian Physiotherapy Stress Incontinence November 2023