

Frequently Asked Questions About Stress Urinary Incontinence

Urology Care
FOUNDATION™

*The Official Foundation of the
American Urological Association*

WHAT IS STRESS URINARY INCONTINENCE (SUI)?

Stress Urinary Incontinence, or SUI, is when urine leaks from the body with sudden pressure on the bladder and urethra. Without control, the sphincter muscles open briefly to cause urine leaks.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE SUI?

If you're healthy but you leak urine without trying, you may have SUI. Urinary "accidents" like this can be a few drops or enough to soak through your clothes. With mild SUI, pressure from sudden forceful activities, like exercise, sneezing, laughing or coughing could lead to leaks. If your SUI is more severe, you may also leak with less forceful activities like standing, walking or bending over.

HOW IS SUI DIFFERENT FROM URGE INCONTINENCE OR OVERACTIVE BLADDER (OAB)?

Overactive Bladder (OAB) or Urge Urinary Incontinence (UUI), is the sudden, urgent, "gotta go to the bathroom" feeling. Some people with OAB leak urine when they feel that urge. The difference between SUI and OAB is anatomical. SUI is a urethral problem while OAB is a bladder problem. For OAB, the bladder will spasm and squeeze uncontrollably. To learn more, visit our OAB pages on UrologyHealth.org.

HOW COMMON IS SUI?

About 1 in 3 women will experience SUI. Urinary incontinence increases with age. Over half of women with SUI also have OAB. When you have both problems at the same time, it's called "Mixed Incontinence."

- About one-third (1 out of 3) of women age 60 find that they sometimes leak urine.
- About half (1 out of 2) of women age 65 and above find that they sometimes leak urine.

SUI is less common in men. For men who have SUI, it is likely due to prostate cancer surgery, pelvic nerve injury or damage. Many men with urine leakage more often have overactive bladder (OAB).

HOW DID I GET SUI?

SUI is not caused simply by aging, and not all women get it. Younger women may get it after childbirth, and men after prostate surgery.

Risk factors for SUI include:

- Gender (women)
- Pregnancy and childbirth
- Nerve injuries to the lower back
- Pelvic or prostate surgery
- Smoking
- Chronic coughing
- Being overweight

WHY DOES IT MATTER IF I HAVE SUI?

SUI can stop you from doing things you enjoy and affect your day-to-day life. You may be embarrassed by your body and not sure what to do about it. SUI can affect the relationship with your partner, especially with respect to having sex. This can lead to feeling alone and even hopeless.

National Headquarters: 1000 Corporate Boulevard, Linthicum, MD 21090

Phone: 410-689-3990 • Fax: 410-689-3878 • 1-800-828-7866 • info@UrologyCareFoundation.org • www.UrologyHealth.org

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To know if SUI is a problem for you, ask yourself: Is SUI keeping me from my daily activities? Have I stopped playing sports? Have I stopped being social because I'm afraid of being embarrassed? Am I unhappy with myself and my body? Am I avoiding sex? If any of your answers are yes, you need to know that you have options to help you manage and treat SUI.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE SUI?

- You can make an appointment with your primary healthcare provider for a basic evaluation or for a referral to a specialist.
- You can talk with friends, or learn more about SUI online – UrologyHealth.org/SUI.
- You can keep a bladder diary (like a food diary) to record when you leak and how much. This can help you and your provider learn about the problem as you seek solutions.

WHERE CAN I FIND PROFESSIONAL HELP?

Not all healthcare providers treat SUI, so it can go undiagnosed and untreated. If your provider is experienced with SUI, he/she can offer basic tests to learn what's happening. An incontinence specialist (a urologist) can confirm the diagnosis and offer more treatment options. If you'd like tips to talk with your doctor, see the Urology Care Foundation's publication, "Talk to Your Doctor About SUI."

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON TREATMENTS FOR SUI?

The first step to relieve SUI is often with lifestyle changes. For example, weight loss can help a lot. It also helps to quit smoking and manage what you eat, drink, and when (avoid alcohol, caffeine and soda and eat more fiber). Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor are recommended too. You can also see a physical therapist to teach you these exercises properly.

Other treatments include:

- Medical devices like a pessary or urethral plug (for women) or penile clamp (for men)
- Surgery including injections, slings or bladder neck suspension (for women), or an artificial sphincter or sling (for men)
- Products like absorbent pads

ARE THERE ANY DRUGS I CAN TAKE FOR SUI?

There are no approved drugs to treat SUI at this time in the U.S.

IS IT A PROBLEM THAT I USE PADS?

No. Pads are a good strategy for people who want comfort and do not consider SUI to be a major problem. They are also a fine option if your symptoms cannot be improved with other treatments. There are several types of pads available today. Many are comfortable and can't be seen with clothing.

SHOULD I THINK ABOUT SURGERY TO CURE MY SUI?

Surgery is an option when lifestyle or nonsurgical treatments don't work. You should only consider surgery if the SUI significantly bothers you. Before going ahead, get a clear diagnosis from an incontinence specialist. Surgery is not easily reversible, and depending on the type of surgery, it is not always long-lasting. It is important to learn everything you can and ask all of your questions before deciding to go ahead with surgery.

IT'S NOT CONVENIENT FOR ME TO HAVE SURGERY RIGHT NOW. CAN I WAIT?

Waiting to have SUI surgery will cause you no harm. Unlike other medical conditions, there is no reason to think delaying surgery for SUI will make the outcome worse. Having surgery of any kind is a big deal, and it can be very expensive. Take the time you need before moving forward.

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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 to go **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.

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