

A PATIENT'S GUIDE

1 in 3 women
experience
Stress Urinary
Incontinence.



IT'S TIME
TO TALK
ABOUT SUI

Urology Care
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American Urological Association

What is Stress Urinary Incontinence?

Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI) is a common medical condition. It involves the involuntary loss of urine that occurs when the forces on the bladder are increased during physical movement of the body. SUI is different from overactive bladder (OAB, also known as urge incontinence), which is the strong, sudden urge to urinate at unexpected times.

SUI is the most common form of incontinence (or leaking urine) in women. Approximately 1 in 3 women will experience some form of Stress Urinary Incontinence during their lifetime. Defined as an *involuntary* loss of urine, SUI can occur when you cough, sneeze, laugh, exercise and sometimes when simply standing up. There is nothing to be embarrassed about if you have this condition and, as your own best advocate, you need to take charge of your urologic health. There are many factors associated with SUI – knowing what to look for and what to expect will help you manage your SUI. The good news is there are treatments that can help.

SUI Triggers

Mild incontinence is often triggered by vigorous activity such as exercise or from sneezing, laughing, coughing or lifting. Moderate/more severe incontinence occurs with any type of small movement such as standing up, walking or bending over.

SUI Risk Factors

It is important to know the **risk factors** for SUI and what you can do to prepare yourself. At the top of the list is being female – you're at a higher risk for developing SUI by nature of your gender. SUI is more common among older women but is not caused simply by aging since it occurs in younger, active, healthy women as well. Caucasian or Hispanic race, being overweight or obese, smoking, and chronic cough (which places frequent strain on the pelvic floor muscles that can, in turn, cause bladder leakage) are also risk factors for development of SUI. Pregnancy and childbirth increase

the chances of SUI because they may stretch, weaken, or damage the pelvic floor muscles, resulting in bladder leakage. Nerve injuries to the lower back and pelvic surgery are also potential risk factors for development of SUI because they weaken the pelvic floor muscles. If you have any of these risk factors, you might experience symptoms of SUI.

SUI Myths

There is a lot of misinformation on SUI and educating yourself on what is and is not true will help empower you. Some of the **myths** you may encounter are:

- It is part of being a woman.
- It is hereditary. My mom had it and so will I.
- I could have prevented it.

SUI can range from mild loss of urine to severe urine loss and the impact it has on a woman's daily life is a determining factor on which treatment she selects, if any at all. You may want to ask yourself a few questions to help determine the impact SUI might be having on your life:

- Is SUI limiting my daily activities?
- Have I stopped participating in activities because I am afraid I will leak?
- Have I become uncomfortable with my body because of the leaking?
- Am I avoiding sex because I am afraid I will leak?
- Have I stopped exercising?

If you find that you are answering 'yes' to these questions, you need to speak to your health care provider to find out what treatment is best for you. Educate yourself, be ready to ask questions and above all, do not be embarrassed. You are not alone – and your health care provider can help.



Frequently Asked Questions About Stress Urinary Incontinence

What is Stress Urinary Incontinence?

Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI) is a common medical condition that involves the involuntary loss of urine that occurs when pressure on the bladder is increased during physical movement of the body.

How do I know if I have SUI?

When you leak urine involuntarily, whether loss of only drops to tablespoons or more, this is SUI. If it is mild incontinence, you will have light leakage during rigorous activity such as playing sports or exercising, or when you sneeze, laugh, cough, or lift something. If it is moderate or more severe incontinence, you will leak urine even with low impact movement such as standing up, walking, or bending over.

How is SUI different from Urge Incontinence, or Overactive Bladder (OAB)?

SUI is different from Overactive Bladder (OAB, also known as Urge Incontinence), which is the strong, sudden urge to urinate at unexpected times, such as during sleep, while SUI is leakage. (This fact sheet does not pertain to OAB.)

How common is SUI?

Estimates of the number of women experiencing SUI vary widely because there is no one definition of the condition. However, urinary leakage is a common medical condition occurring in about one out of every three women at some time in their lives. Among these women, about six in ten have both SUI and OAB. Of this group, about one in three have SUI. Approximately one-third of women age 30 to age 60, and one-third of women under the age of 30, experience urinary incontinence.

How did I get SUI?

SUI is more common among older women, but is not caused simply by aging. It occurs in younger, active, healthy women as well. Caucasian or Hispanic race, being obese, smoking, and chronic cough (which places frequent strain on the pelvic floor muscles that can, in turn, cause bladder leakage) are risk factors for development of SUI. Pregnancy and childbirth increase the chances of SUI because they may stretch, weaken, or damage the pelvic floor muscles, resulting in bladder leakage. Nerve injuries to the lower back and pelvic surgery are also potential causes of SUI because they weaken the pelvic floor muscles.

Why does it matter if I have SUI?

SUI can interfere with your life and day-to-day decisions about your social activities. You may be embarrassed by your body and feel you can't talk about urinary leakage to your friends and loved ones. SUI can affect the relationship with your partner, especially because you may be embarrassed about having sex. This can lead to feeling isolated and even hopeless.

To know if SUI is a problem for you, ask yourself: Is SUI limiting my daily activities? Have I stopped playing sports? Have I stopped other recreational activities or changed my lifestyle in any way because I'm afraid of urine leakage? Have I become uncomfortable with myself and my body? Am I avoiding sex because I am worried that I may leak urine and be embarrassed? If any of your answers are yes, you need to know that there is hope and there are options to help you better manage and treat SUI.



I don't want surgery. What else can I do?

- You can keep your weight in a healthy range, stay in good overall health, and do not smoke. Weight loss is especially important for obese women and can reduce or eliminate SUI.
- Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises. Your provider can help you locate the pelvic floor muscles and teach you exercises to strengthen them each day in order to help prevent stress urine loss.
- Urinary control devices are good for women who are not physically fit or interested in other treatments. They are a way of reducing pressure inside the pelvis or supporting the bladder, neck and urethra, which can then reduce stress urine leakage. Your provider can explain these and help you decide which if any are appropriate for you.

Are there any drugs I can take for SUI?

There are currently no approved drugs in the United States to treat SUI.

Common myths about SUI:

- ▶ "It's a normal part of being a woman."
- ▶ "My mother had SUI, so I have it – it's hereditary."
- ▶ "SUI is a normal, inevitable part of aging – it only happens to older, not younger women."
- ▶ "Urine leakage happens because of a dropped bladder."
- ▶ "I could have prevented it with pelvic exercises."
- ▶ "SUI can't be treated."
- ▶ "Surgery is the only way to treat SUI."
- ▶ "If you get treatment early, you'll prevent it from getting worse."
- ▶ "SUI surgery is not permanent and will only last a few years."

1 in 3 women will experience SUI in their lifetime. Talk to your doctor and get the help you need.

For more copies of this and other materials about SUI, incontinence and other urologic conditions, visit UrologyHealth.org/Order or call 1-800-828-7866.

For more information, contact:

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