



Regaining Control: Managing Incontinence with Physical Therapy

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Are you one of the many women who suffer from urinary incontinence and are ashamed or embarrassed to discuss it with your doctor? Do you feel as if you have lost control over your own body? Do not worry; this is a very common problem that people are afraid to admit they have. If you are looking to find an alternative to medicines, diapers, or surgery, you will find your answer here: Physical Therapy.

What is Incontinence?

Urinary incontinence means you lose urine when you do not want to. There are two types of urinary incontinence: Stress incontinence and Urge incontinence.

- **Stress Incontinence** is the most common bladder control problem in women. This occurs when you sneeze, cough, laugh, jog or anything that puts pressure on the bladder. Urine leakage occurs because of weak pelvic floor muscles and poor ligament support at the bladder and urethra.
- **Urge Incontinence** is when urine leakage occurs as soon as you get the urge to go to the bathroom. The sensation is overwhelming your bladder muscle, the detrusor, tightens at the wrong time, and you cannot control it. These inappropriate contractions can stem from a bladder infection, bladder irritability after surgery, or poor dietary and bladder habits. Sometimes they are caused by problems with the nervous system.

How can Physical Therapy Treat Incontinence?

A recent study from the *Annals of Internal Medicine* (March 18, 2008) reported that pelvic floor muscle training, with bladder training, resolved the symptoms of urinary incontinence as compared to drug therapy, electrostimulation, injectable bulking agents, and local estrogen therapy.

A physical therapist will determine which form of incontinence you suffer, assess the strength, motor control and endurance of pelvic floor muscles, and will develop an individualized exercise treatment.

Kegel Exercises:

Kegel exercises are pelvic floor muscle exercises that are used to effectively treat incontinence. Kegel exercises involve:

- Squeezing the same muscles used during urination. These are the muscles that are involved in stopping urine midstream. The stomach and buttocks should not move with this flexing.
- Holding the squeeze for 3 seconds, and then relaxing for 3 seconds.
- Repeating the exercise 10 to 15 times per session.

Bladder Drills:

Each time you feel the need to “go”, stop the feeling by contracting your pelvic floor muscles and try to hold the urine a little longer each time, gradually increasing your time between voids.

Identifying these muscles are vital for treatment. These exercises can be performed virtually anywhere: at work, while driving, during toileting, or at the gym. However, lying down on your back is recommended for beginners.

Incontinence is nothing to be ashamed of; it is a silent problem that plagues women of all ages. Talk to your doctor to learn what your options are. Also, seek a Physical Therapist who is trained in Women’s health to help you fight the battle of incontinence.

References:

1. American Physical Therapy Association: www.apta.org
2. Women’s Health Foundation: www.rizvimd.com/female.htm