



INCONTINENCE FACT SHEET

What is Incontinence?

Incontinence is a loss of bowel and/or bladder control. Approximately one out of every 100 American adults suffer from incontinence — often in silence and isolated by the fear of having “an accident.”

This is most unfortunate because in many cases, incontinence can be successfully treated with excellent results.

What causes Incontinence?

A variety of conditions may cause incontinence, including injury to the anal and/or pelvic muscles during childbirth or surgery. As we grow older, our muscles tend to relax, and we may lose some or all of our ability to control them. Incontinence may also be caused by a variety of neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injuries. What is important to note is that incontinence is an involuntary condition — it's like developing a need for eyeglasses; we have no control over it.

How is Incontinence treated?

Treatment of incontinence depends to some extent on the type and cause of the disorder.

Approximately 70% of patients with incontinence can control their condition through a bowel management program. Such a program may involve Kegel exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles and changes in one's diet. A high-fiber diet is often effective in controlling diarrhea.

Your physician may also recommend an enema program and anti-diarrhea medication as a means of regulating and controlling your bowel. Neither should be used without the supervision of your physician.

If the bowel management program does not achieve maximum control, your physician may recommend muscle control therapy. This type of therapy involves retraining the pelvic muscles (biofeedback) and is effective in more than 60% of the cases.

Surgery is rarely required to treat incontinence. Your physician can explain treatment options in greater detail.

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INCONTINENCE (continued)

Can Incontinence lead to more serious problems?

Incontinence does not lead to more serious digestive disorders; however, it can greatly disrupt your lifestyle if treatment is not sought. Also, because incontinence is often the result of weakened muscles, it is important to seek treatment at the earliest sign of a problem — before the situation appears “uncontrollable.”