

Health Education Fact Sheet

From Nurses for You

**Nursing Best
Practice Guideline**

Incontinence: Breaking the Silence

Did you know that urinary incontinence affects over 3 million Canadians?

Urinary incontinence is the involuntary loss of urine and can be an embarrassing problem. Fortunately, help is available!

Here are some facts that might surprise you:

- Urinary incontinence can touch individuals at any stage of life, but it is most common with older adults.
- It affects one in four Canadians over the age of 65.
- It can disrupt normal routines and cause people to avoid activities they used to enjoy.
- Most people experiencing incontinence suffer in silence and do not seek help.

Urinary incontinence is a **Symptom**, not a disease. It is **Not** a natural part of aging but there are some things related to age that can contribute to the problem. Factors which can contribute to incontinence are:

- Difficulty getting to the toilet due to physical limitations;
- Caffeine intake in tea, coffee and some soft drinks can cause irritability of the bladder causing urgency, frequency of urination and incontinence;
- Not drinking enough fluids makes your urine more concentrated, which can irritate your bladder and cause you to urinate more often;
- Constipation;
- Conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis or other health problems that affect the nervous system can contribute to incontinence;



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- A bladder infection;
- Some medications can increase the frequency of urination (water pills or diuretics) while others can reduce your awareness of the urge to void (sedatives, tranquilizers and muscle relaxants); and
- Coughing, sneezing, laughing, lifting or any activity that causes increased pressure on the bladder and pelvic floor.

What can you do to help yourself:

- Reduce your caffeine intake or switch to decaffeinated beverages.
- If it takes you a while to get to the bathroom, then get into a routine of going at regular intervals every 2 to 3 hours rather than waiting for the sudden urge.
- Keep your bowels regular and avoid constipation.
- Increase your water intake to 4 to 5 glasses per day along with your regular fluid intake.
- If you are still having problems talk to your doctor about a continence assessment with a urologist, urogynecologist or nurse continence advisor.

Where else can I get information?

If you or a family member/friend have access to a computer, visit The Canadian Continence Foundation website at www.continence-fdn.ca or call their consumer helpline at 1-800-265-9575 for additional information on urinary incontinence.

This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNAO Nursing Best Practice Guideline document developed for nurses. Its intent is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Promoting Continence Using Prompted Voiding*, is available for public viewing and free download at www.rnao.org/bestpractices.

Break the silence. Get help and live your life without having to worry about urinary incontinence.