



CENTER FOR SPECIALIZED WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Medical Options for Urinary Incontinence

The loss of bladder control — called urinary incontinence — affects between 13 and 17 million adult Americans, with close to half of all women in the United States experiencing some degree of urinary incontinence.

Thankfully, today there are new and non-invasive options that may be right for you. At Cleveland Clinic's [Center for Specialized Women's Health](#), our team can carefully review your medical and family history, diagnose your condition, and customize a treatment option that best suits your needs. Cleveland Clinic's gynecology program is top ranked in Ohio, and ranked No. 3 in the nation, according to *U.S. News & World Report*.

### What is incontinence?

Millions of women experience involuntary loss of urine, called urinary incontinence. Some women may lose a few drops of urine while running or coughing. Others may feel a strong, sudden urge to urinate just before losing a large amount of urine. Many women experience both symptoms. Incontinence can be slightly bothersome or totally debilitating. It keeps some women from enjoying many activities with families and friends. Urine loss also can occur during sexual activity, causing tremendous emotional distress.

### Who is affected?

Women experience urinary incontinence twice as often as men due to pregnancy and childbirth, menopause and the structure of the female urinary tract. But both women and men can become incontinent from neurologic injury, birth defects, stroke, multiple sclerosis and physical problems associated with aging.



Same-day appointments are available, call 216.444.6601 or toll-free 800.223.2273, ext. 46601



Urinary incontinence should not be considered a disease, but rather a symptom or sign of an underlying problem. It should not be considered a “normal part of aging” but a condition that can be treated.

### What causes incontinence?

Incontinence occurs because of problems with the muscles and nerves that help to hold or release urine.

The body stores urine in the bladder, a balloon-like organ. The bladder connects to the urethra, the tube through which urine leaves the body. During urination, muscles in the wall of the bladder contract, forcing urine out of the bladder and into the urethra. At the same time, sphincter muscles surrounding the urethra relax, letting urine pass out of the body.

Incontinence will occur if the bladder muscles suddenly contract or the sphincter muscles are not strong enough to hold back urine. Urine may escape with less pressure than usual if the muscles are damaged, causing a change in the position of the bladder.

### What are the different types of incontinence?

Two of the most common types of incontinence include:

**Stress incontinence** — This common form of incontinence in women is readily treatable. Coughing, laughing, sneezing or other movements that put pressure on the bladder cause urine to leak from the bladder. Physical changes resulting most frequently from pregnancy, childbirth and menopause often cause stress incontinence.

**Urge incontinence** — Also called having an overactive bladder, people with this type of incontinence suddenly feel the need or urge to urinate and lose urine for no apparent reason. The most common cause of urge incontinence is involuntary bladder contractions. The bladder may empty during sleep or after

drinking a small amount of water. Usually, urge incontinence is accompanied by frequent urination and the need to get up in the middle of the night.

### How is incontinence treated?

Treatment options for incontinence vary depending on the type and cause of urine loss. At Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Specialized Women’s Health, medical treatment for both stress and urge incontinence is customized to meet each individual patient’s needs. Options include:

**Exercises** — Exercises to strengthen or retrain pelvic floor muscles and sphincter muscles can reduce urinary leakage.

**Combination stimulation and biofeedback therapy** — This new option for patients uses a custom-fit device patients use at home that utilizes stimulation to strengthen pelvic floor muscles and inhibit overactive bladder muscles, while giving visual biofeedback and audible guidance. Precise adjustments can be made to ensure effective muscle training.

**If medical treatments are unable to control the incontinence, additional surgical options are available.**

### Why choose Cleveland Clinic?

You can trust Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Specialized Women’s Health to provide a comprehensive approach to your health-care in a warm and supportive environment. Our gynecology program is ranked No. 3 in the nation by *U. S. News & World Report* — and top ranked in Ohio.

## Ready to schedule an appointment?

If you would like help from our specialists to help get your incontinence under control, schedule an appointment with the [Center for Specialized Women's Health](#) by calling **216.444.6601** or **800.223.2273, ext. 46601**.

Same-day appointments are available.

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## Center for Specialized Women's Health Staff

Visit [clevelandclinic.org/womenshealth](http://clevelandclinic.org/womenshealth) for a complete listing of our women's health specialists.



## About Speaking of Women's Health

You care for your family, your friends and your pets. You deserve a little "me time," too! Speaking of Women's Health is a national women's health education program managed by Cleveland Clinic under the leadership of [Holly L. Thacker, MD](#). Its mission is to educate women to make informed decisions about their health, well-being and personal safety for themselves and their families.

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The Ob/Gyn & Women's Health Institute provides a full spectrum of care for women from adolescence through mature adulthood. Institute members provide collaborative care for gynecological cancers, infertility, incontinence, pelvic floor disorders and other women's health issues in a supportive environment enhanced by innovative research. The Ob/Gyn & Women's Health Institute is one of 27 clinical and special expertise institutes at Cleveland Clinic, a nonprofit academic medical center ranked as the No. 2 hospital in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*. More than 3,400 staff physicians and researchers in 140 specialties at Cleveland Clinic collaborate to give every patient the best outcome and experience.  
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