

Focus On: Stress Incontinence

Your pelvic floor muscles help control the flow of urine from your bladder through a tube called the urethra.

Many things, including childbirth, surgery, hormones, weight gain, and sometimes medicines, can cause changes in the pelvic floor muscles.

These changes can lead to stress incontinence.

Stress incontinence means that you leak a small amount of urine when you do something that puts stress, strain, or pressure on your bladder.

It can happen, for example, when you cough, laugh, or lift something.

Stress incontinence can be treated with lifestyle changes, such as avoiding running or jumping; losing weight if you need to; and avoiding caffeine, carbonated drinks, and alcohol.

If you have a vagina, a small device called a pessary can also help. It fits inside the vagina and helps support the bladder and urethra.

Your doctor may also recommend strengthening your pelvic floor muscles with exercises. A pelvic floor physical therapist can show you how.

For some people, bladder training may help as well. This is where you train your bladder, over time, to hold more urine by slowly increasing the amount of time between bathroom trips.

If other treatments do not work, your doctor may recommend surgery.

To learn more about stress incontinence, talk to your doctor.