

## Urinary Incontinence

### WHAT IS URINARY INCONTINENCE?

It's escape of urine from the bladder without being able to control it. It is NOT normal in any age group older than toddlers, and is usually a symptom of an underlying problem.

### HOW COMMON IS IT?

20% of New Zealanders over 10 years of age will have a problem with urinary incontinence. One in two New Zealanders over 75 years of age report urinary incontinence problems. It is more common in women and older people.

### WARNING SIGNS OF URINARY INCONTINENCE PROBLEMS

- Leakage or urine regardless of amount, when you cough, sneeze, laugh, stand or walk.
- An urgent need to pass urine, unable to hold on.
- Passing small amounts frequently and consistently, over eight times per day in small amounts.
- Having to get up several times overnight to pass urine.
- Bed wetting over the age of five years.
- A sense that the bladder is not empty once urine has been passed.
- Difficulty in maintaining a steady stream of urine – stops and starts.

### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

There are specific types of urinary incontinence with several possible causes. Some people may have more than one type. Types include:

### URGE INCONTINENCE

This is the sensation of needing to go to the toilet very quickly with the sudden loss of urine. This urge is due to overactive contractions of the bladder.

Common causes of urge incontinence include:

- Ageing process – the most common cause of incontinence in older people.
- Urinary tract infections.
- Long history of poor bladder habits.
- Conditions such as stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, enlarged prostate.
- Constipation.
- Anxiety.
- The 'urge syndrome' which particularly affects girls of primary school age.

#### STRESS INCONTINENCE

This is the leakage of urine when coughing, sneezing, laughing or exercising.

It is the most common cause of urinary incontinence in women.

Common causes include:

- Pregnancy and vaginal childbirth.
- Hormonal changes which occur with breastfeeding and after menopause.
- In men, as a result of prostate surgery.

#### OVERFLOW INCONTINENCE

This occurs when the bladder is unable to empty completely due to an outlet obstruction or weakened bladder muscle.

Common causes include:

- Enlarged prostate
- Urethral stricture
- Spinal injury or disorder
- Functional Incontinence
- Inability to identify a toilet, or inability to get there. Common causes: Loss of memory & Poor mobility.

#### OTHER FACTORS WHICH MAY INCREASE URINARY INCONTINENCE

- Obesity
- Constipation

- General Posture
- Certain Medications
- Anxiety
- Urinary Infections

#### WHAT CAN I DO IF I HAVE A PROBLEM?

You can seek help from your doctor who may offer treatment directly or refer you to a specialist, or a qualified continence advisor.

You can also practice some good bladder habits:

- Try to drink at least 1.5 litres (6–8 cups) of fluid per day unless advised otherwise by your doctor. Some people with incontinence limit their fluid intake; this is not a good practice as it may reduce bladder storage capacity and make the incontinence worse.
- Limit the amount of alcohol and caffeine (coffee, cola, tea) you drink as they increase urine production.
- Take time when emptying your bladder making sure you empty the bladder completely. For females this should be in the seated position.
- Try to only go to the toilet when you feel the urge and your bladder is full. Don't be in the habit of going 'just in case' as this may result in the bladder developing a smaller capacity.
- Keep bowels regular and avoid constipation. Continual straining when using your bowels may weaken muscles around the bladder.
- Regular pelvic floor exercises help keep tone in pelvic floor muscles.
- Lose excess weight as this creates extra load on pelvic floor muscles.

Seek Help NOW – Bladder problems can be cured, improved or managed if treated.