

# Natural Help 4...

# Incontinence



## What is Incontinence?

Incontinence is the medical term for the **involuntary loss of excretory functions** or bodily fluids. Urinary incontinence is the most common form of incontinence which occurs when urine leaks out of the bladder and cannot be controlled. There are also many different types of incontinence such as fecal incontinence or stress incontinence. Incontinence typically affects older adults and women, but may also affect children.

It is an extremely embarrassing problem which can bring about a range of emotions such as and fear, loneliness and depression. Seeking treatment for incontinence can improve symptoms as well as address emotional concerns.

There are various types of incontinence and these include:

- **Fecal incontinence**  
Fecal incontinence is characterized by the inability to control bowel movements which causes feces (stool) to leak involuntarily from the rectum. This type of incontinence may be caused by constipation, diarrhea, nerve or muscle damage, childbirth or a weakened anal sphincter. It is very embarrassing and most commonly affects older people and women.
- **Stress incontinence**  
This form of incontinence is occurs when an individual experiences involuntary leaks of urine after laughing, coughing, sneezing or any type of physical exertion such as lifting or straining. Stress incontinence is caused when the abdominal muscles press down on the bladder and weakens the sphincter muscles. Certain medications, constipation, obesity, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause may contribute to the cause of stress incontinence.
- **Urge incontinence**  
Urge incontinence refers to a strong desire to urinate. This occurs because of an overactive bladder which causes contractions and an urgent desire to empty the bladder. Very often individuals with this condition have difficulty reaching the bathroom in time or have to visit the bathroom frequently during the day and at night. Urge incontinence affects elderly people because of aging those who have had surgical procedures performed such as the removal of prostate glands.
- **Overflow incontinence**  
This type of incontinence is caused by a constant dribbling of urine due to an overfull bladder. People suffering from overflow incontinence often feel as though they cannot empty their bladders completely. This is the result of blockage of the urinary flow such as an enlarged prostate gland, disease of the nervous system, diabetes or certain medications.

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- **Functional incontinence**

This type of incontinence occurs when you have normal urine control but have trouble getting to the bathroom in time. You may not be able to get to the bathroom because of severe arthritis or Alzheimer's disease that makes it hard to move around. It commonly affects older adults, particularly those in nursing homes.

## Diagnosing Incontinence

If you notice any persistent bladder or bowel changes, consult your doctor immediately. The **diagnosis for urinary incontinence** is based on your symptoms, a physical examination, and a review of your medical history. Keeping a diary of about the type of **incontinence**, **patterns of urination or bowel habits** can be useful for your physician.

Certain tests such as a urinalysis and blood tests may be ordered to establish the **cause of incontinence**. Specialized testing such as a postvoid residual (PVR) measurement, pelvic ultrasound, urodynamic testing, cystogram or cystoscopy may also be performed.

## What causes Incontinence?

There are a number of conditions and factors that can cause **incontinence** and these include:

- Recurring urinary tract infections
- Aging
- Surgical procedures such as the removal of the prostate gland
- Prostate cancer
- Pregnancy
- Childbirth
- Menopause
- Constipation
- Diabetes
- Nervous system disorders
- Spinal injuries
- Multiple sclerosis
- Parkinson's disease
- Senile dementia
- Certain medications

## Help for Incontinence

There are a variety of treatment options to treat or **reduce the symptoms of incontinence**. Making certain dietary changes such as eliminating spicy foods, sweet foods containing sugar or honey, citrus fruits and tomato based sauces can improve **urinary incontinence**. Reduce your intake of alcoholic, carbonated and caffeinated beverages.

Monitor how frequently you go to the bathroom and record this information so that you can share it with your physician. Try to urinate before you go to bed and when you wake up first thing in the morning. Practice Kegel exercises (do so by



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### Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

periodically 'squeezing' to stop urine flow, then releasing, while urinating) to **control urination and strengthen bladder muscles.**

[Incontinence](#) may be the cause of an underlying disorder, if this is the case, the disorder should be treated first. Medications such as **antibiotics are often used to treat incontinence.** However antibiotics have also been shown to disrupt the bodies natural 'good' bacteria (so always take pro-biotics along with any antibiotics you are prescribed).

More advanced [incontinence](#) can be treated with surgery but these procedures carry certain risks such as infection or trauma to nearby organs.

Herbal and homeopathic remedies provide a natural alternative to antibiotics by supporting the body's natural balance and toning the entire urinary system. Herbs such as Astragalus membranaceous and Equisetum arvense have a beneficial effect on the immune system and promote healthy bladder functioning. Homeopathic ingredients such as Calcium fluor, Nat. phos and Nat.sulph maintain the healthy functioning of the bladder, liver, pancreas and prostate. Alternative treatments such as biofeedback can also lessen [incontinence](#).

## Tips to prevent incontinence

- Avoid certain foods (spicy foods, high-acid foods or foods containing caffeine) and fluids (citrus juices, carbonated drinks, alcoholic and caffeinated beverages) that may worsen [incontinence](#) and eliminate them
- Avoid drinking large amounts of fluids at once rather sip water throughout the day
- Eat a high fiber diet as constipation can aggravate [incontinence](#)
- Urinate when you feel the urge as holding it in can weaken the bladder and cause urine leakage
- Use [incontinence](#) pads, panty liners, diapers or absorptive underwear to avoid embarrassing situations
- Practice Kegel exercises to strengthen pelvic floor muscles and help control urinary [incontinence](#)
- Maintain a healthy weight as dramatic weight-loss or weight-gain can release the pressure off the bladder control muscles or put pressure on the bladder
- Speak to your partner about how [incontinence](#) is affecting you
- Reduce stress by practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises, meditation or listening to soothing music
- Stop smoking because smokers are more likely to develop [urinary incontinence](#)

## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

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Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies



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have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

## **Related Natural Remedies:**

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