Managing Incontinence After Prostate Cancer Treatment

When you lose control of your bladder, it is called incontinence. A lot of men have incontinence after prostate cancer treatment. If you have this problem, you are not alone.

Incontinence might only last a short time. In time, the muscles that control the passing of urine may get strong enough to control urination again. But incontinence can also be a long-term side effect of prostate cancer treatment. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you are having trouble controlling your urine. There are ways to help it.

Sometimes incontinence is caused by more than one problem. Your doctor will ask you questions and order tests to learn what is causing your incontinence. Knowing your type of incontinence will help you and your doctor find the best way to manage it.

Types of incontinence

There are 3 types of incontinence; each has different causes and different symptoms:

Stress incontinence

This type of incontinence occurs when the muscles that squeeze the urethra to keep urine in the bladder are weak. (The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the penis.) Stress incontinence is a common side effect of prostate surgery. Lifting heavy objects, getting up from a chair, coughing, sneezing, or laughing may cause urine to leak. You may sleep through the night without having to get up to go to the bathroom, but leak when you get up in the morning. Going to the bathroom more often is a way to handle stress incontinence.

Overflow incontinence

When the bladder is too full it is called overflow incontinence. Signs of overflow incontinence may be getting up often during the night to go to the bathroom, taking a long time to urinate, or having a weak, dribbling stream with no force. You may pass
small amounts of urine but do not feel empty. Or you may feel like you have to go to the bathroom but cannot. It may cause you to leak urine throughout the day.

**Urge incontinence**

Urge incontinence is when the bladder contracts too often, usually without warning. It may be the result of a prostate infection or irritation from radiation therapy. Because you cannot hold a normal amount of urine, you go to the bathroom a lot and may wet yourself if you don't get there right away. You may feel as if you have a weak bladder, or that liquids go right through you. You may even wet the bed at night.

In rare cases, men lose all ability to control their urine. This is called **continuous incontinence**.

**Treatment for incontinence**

Your treatment will depend on the type, cause, and severity of the problem. Your doctor might recommend medicine or exercises to strengthen your muscles. There are also artificial devices that can sometimes be used. Ask your doctor what treatments could work for you.

Even if your incontinence cannot be completely corrected, it can still be helped. You can learn to manage and live with it so you can do the things you want to do.

**More help**

There is no one right way to cope with incontinence. The challenge is to find what works for you so you can return to a normal daily life. Many incontinence products can help keep you active and comfortable. The right one will depend on how much leakage you have, when the leakage occurs, how easy and comfortable the product is to use, and the cost.

Pads can be worn under your clothing. Padded adult briefs are bulkier than pads but provide more protection. Bed pads can also be used to protect the bed and mattress while you sleep.

Sheaths, called condom catheters, and compression devices can be placed on the penis to help control incontinence. For men who leak small amounts of urine all the time, a small pad with waterproof backing may be worn over the penis. It is held in place by snug underwear. For some types of incontinence, putting a catheter into the bladder to drain urine may be an option. It is easy to learn to do and is usually safe and painless.

Talk with your doctor about the best ways to manage your incontinence.
Education and support

You may find it helpful to talk with other men who are dealing with incontinence. Ask your doctor or nurse, or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 to see whether an American Cancer Society Man to Man® education and support group meets in your area. You might also find other men to talk with on our Cancer Survivors NetworkSM at www.cancer.org.

More resources

More information from your American Cancer Society

We have selected some related information that may also be helpful to you. These materials may be ordered from our toll-free number at 1-800-227-2345.

*Prostate Cancer -- A Detailed Guide* (also available in Spanish)

*Prostate Cancer Overview* (also available in Spanish)

*Sexuality for the Man with Cancer* (also available in Spanish)

National organizations and Web sites*

**American Urological Association**

Toll-free number: 1-866-RINGAUA (1-866-746-4282)

Web site: www.auanet.org

Has information on prostate cancer (some of which is available in Spanish) and online learning programs

**National Association for Continence**

Toll-free number: 1-800-BLADDER (1-800-252-3337)

Web site: www.nafc.org

Has information on the causes, prevention, diagnosis, treatments, and alternative management strategies for stress urinary and urge urinary incontinence. The Web site is also available in Spanish

Books*


*Inclusion on these lists does not imply endorsement by the American Cancer Society.

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