

# Stress Urinary Incontinence

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Urology Care*  
FOUNDATION™  
The Official Foundation of the  
American Urological Association

### What is Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI)?

Stress Urinary Incontinence, or SUI, is when urine leaks from the body with a sudden increase in abdominal pressure. Examples would be leaking with coughing, sneezing or laughing.

### Do I have SUI?

With mild SUI, pressure from sudden forceful motions, like workouts, sneezing, laughing or coughing, could lead to leaks. If your SUI is more severe, you may also leak with less forceful actions like standing, walking or bending over. Urinary “accidents” like this can be a few drops or enough to soak through your clothes.

### Is SUI the Same as Overactive Bladder (OAB)?

No, SUI is not the same as Overactive Bladder (OAB) or Urgency Urinary Incontinence (UUI). OAB and UUI are the sudden, urgent, “gotta go to the bathroom” feeling. Some people with OAB leak urine when they feel that urge. SUI is a problem with the urethra and OAB is a problem with the bladder. More than half of women with SUI also have OAB. When you have both problems at the same time, it’s called “Mixed Urinary Incontinence.” To learn more about OAB, visit [UrologyHealth.org/OAB](http://UrologyHealth.org/OAB).

### How Common is SUI?

About 1 in 3 women have SUI. Urinary incontinence increases with age. About one-third of women who are 60 years old leak urine sometimes and about half of women

ages 65 and over leak urine sometimes.

SUI is less common in men. For many men who have SUI, it is often due to prostate cancer surgery or pelvic nerve damage. Often, the reason men leak urine is due to OAB.

### How Did I Get SUI?

Some people think SUI is a normal part of aging or that all women get it – this is not true. Younger women may get SUI after giving birth and men may get SUI after prostate surgery. Other risk factors for SUI are:

- Gender (women)
- Pregnancy and giving birth
- Nerve damage to the lower back
- Pelvic or prostate surgery
- Smoking
- Constant coughing
- Being overweight

### Why Does it Matter if I Have SUI?

SUI may stop you from doing things you enjoy by changing your day-to-day life. You may feel embarrassed by your body and not sure what to do about it. SUI may alter the relationship with your partner, and can affect sex. This may lead to feeling alone and even hopeless.

To know if SUI is a problem for you, try asking yourself: Is SUI keeping me from my daily activities? Have I stopped playing sports? Have I stopped being social? Am I unhappy

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with my body and myself? Do I avoid sex? If any of your answers are yes, you should know there are options to help you live with and treat SUI.

### What Should I Do if I Think I Have SUI?

- Meet with a doctor to talk about options or for a referral to a specialist.
- Talk with friends, or learn more about SUI online at [UrologyHealth.org/SUI](https://UrologyHealth.org/SUI).
- Keep a bladder diary (like a food diary) to record when you leak and how much. This may help you and your health care team learn more about your leaking.

### Where Can I Find Help?

Not all health care providers treat SUI, so it can go undiagnosed and untreated. Some primary care providers are able to offer basic tests to learn more about your symptoms. Other times, it may be best to see a urologist about treatment choices.

### What are the Most Common Treatments for SUI?

Lifestyle changes are often the first step to relieve SUI. Weight loss can help a lot. Kegel exercises may be used to strengthen your pelvic floor to help with SUI. You may do Kegels on your own or see a physical therapist to teach you how to do them properly.

Other treatments include:

- Medical devices, like an incontinence pessary (for women) or penile clamp (for men)
- Surgery including injections, slings or bladder neck suspension (for women), or an artificial sphincter or sling (for men)
- Products like absorbent pads

### Should I Think About Surgery for SUI?

Surgery is an option when lifestyle or nonsurgical treatments don't work. It's best to get a clear diagnosis from a urologist who is an expert in bladder control first. Surgery is not easily

reversible and, depending on the type of surgery, it may not always be long lasting. If your SUI significantly bothers you, surgery may be an option to consider.

### Is It Okay to Wait to Have Surgery?

Waiting to have SUI surgery will not cause you harm. Unlike surgery for other medical conditions, there is no reason to think delaying surgery for SUI will make the outcome worse. Having surgery of any kind is a big deal, so it is okay to take the time you need to decide.

### Could Using Pads be a Good Choice to Help Me with SUI?

Pads are a good choice for people who want comfort and do not feel SUI is a major problem. They are also a good choice if your leaking does not get better with other treatments. There are several types of pads available today. Many are comfortable and can't be seen with clothing.

### About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts. To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, [UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions](https://UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions) or go to [UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist](https://UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist) to find a doctor near you.

### Disclaimer

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologists or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications. For copies of printed and other urologic conditions, visit [UrologyHealth.org/Order](https://UrologyHealth.org/Order) or call 800-828-7866.