

Lifestyle Lifestyle Lifestyle Lifestyle

Urinary incontinence - no need to suffer in silence

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MANY women leak urine at some point in their life and it is thought that about 20% of ladies have regular episodes of urinary incontinence. This means that a huge number of people in the UK will be affected and there are probably about 8,000 women within West Hertfordshire who have problems with bladder control.

Perhaps because of embarrassment it is sometimes difficult to talk about this problem even with close friends or your GP. However, there is no need to suffer in silence because if you have this problem you are not alone and there are excellent local NHS and private services available to help.

Types of Incontinence:

- **Stress incontinence** is the most common type of urinary leakage and is more likely to occur in those women who have had a vaginal birth or difficult delivery (although this isn't always the case). Characteristically women leak with coughing,

sneezing or exercise and this can interfere with family life and personal relationships.

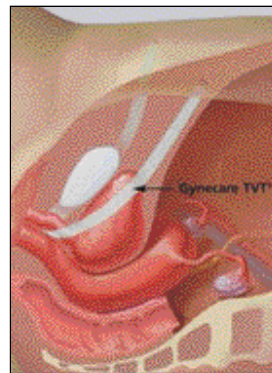
- Some women suddenly feel the need to go to the toilet (also known as urgency) and if they don't make it they can have an accident - this is called **Urge incontinence**. This type of incontinence is most often due to an overactive bladder, a problem which becomes more common as you get older. Often women also need to go to the toilet frequently during the day and have to get up to pass urine during the night.

- Some women have both types of leakage and they are then said to have **Mixed incontinence**.

What treatment is available?

Pelvic floor exercises, sometimes under the supervision of a physiotherapist, can help approximately 60% of patients with stress incontinence. If they don't produce sufficient improvement most women will be suitable to have a Tension-free Vaginal Tape (TVT)

operation. This is a simple and safe day case procedure which normally takes 20-30 minutes to perform usually under a general anaesthetic. A sling is placed under the bladder to give it more support (see picture below) using tiny incisions in the pubic hair and vagina. Approximately 90-95% of women will no longer leak when they cough or exercise with many patients saying "I have been



given my life back."

Women with urge incontinence need to make sure they don't drink excessively and have too much tea or coffee as this may exacerbate their problem. It is sometimes possible to retrain the bladder so that it gets back into good habits. If this doesn't work medication may help. Botulinum toxin injections can help some women having severe leakage problems due to an overactive bladder but research on their long term effectiveness is lacking and they are not widely available.

How do I get help?

Not everyone who leaks urine will want to have treatment. Some women prefer to wear a pad or stop doing the type of exercise which causes the leakage (e.g. running). However, if you would like help please speak to your GP or practice nurse who may try some treatments or refer you to the continence team if necessary. It is most likely that the treatment will help and, if the leaking stops, you will regain your confidence and feel much better in yourself.