

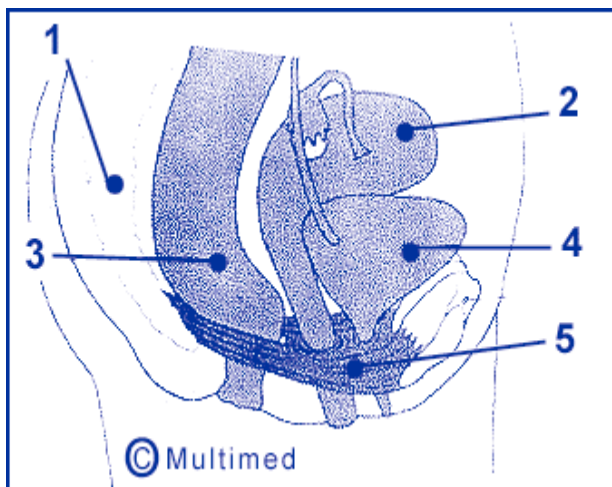
Advice for Women with Cystic Fibrosis. Urinary Leakage and its Treatment

This leaflet tells you about causes and treatment available for women suffering with urinary leakage. It explains what is involved and the common complications associated with this condition. It is not meant to replace discussion between you and your doctor, but as a guide to be used in connection to what is discussed with your doctor.

Women can sometimes experience the unwanted leakage of urine. Frequently this is due to weak pelvic floor muscles.

What is the pelvic floor?

The floor of the pelvis is made up of layers of muscle which attach like a hammock between the pubic bone at the front and the coccyx (tail bone) at the back. The urethra (bladder outlet) and the anus (back passage or bowel outlet) pass through the pelvic floor muscles.



- 1 The Spine
- 2 The Uterus (Womb)
- 3 The Rectum
- 4 The Bladder
- 5 The Pelvic Floor Muscles

What does the pelvic floor do?

Strong pelvic floor muscles normally support the contents of the pelvis, help control the bladder and bowels and help maintain good sexual function.

What happens if the pelvic floor muscles become weak?

Weakness of these muscles means that support for the openings of the bladder and bowel is not so effective. This can result in the leaking of urine from the bladder in situations when these muscles are put under stress ('stress incontinence').

Many women suffer from stress incontinence caused by pelvic floor muscle weakness. However, if you have cystic fibrosis (CF), you may be more prone to stress incontinence than other women.

Causes of stress incontinence

Anything that increases the pressure in the abdominal (stomach) cavity can cause urinary leakage. This includes:

- coughing and sneezing
- chest physiotherapy
- repeated heavy lifting
- vomiting
- laughing
- performing spirometry
- aerobic exercise (e.g. running, cycling)
- certain abdominal (stomach) strengthening exercises
- repeated straining to empty your bowels, generally caused by constipation.

Other causes of stress incontinence

During pregnancy, the effect of changing hormones and the weight of the unborn baby 'sitting' on the pelvic floor muscles can cause them to weaken. Further weakness can occur after a vaginal birth because the pelvic floor muscles are stretched when the baby is delivered.

If you are inactive for a long period of time, due to being unwell or following surgery, all the body's muscles (including those of the pelvic floor) can weaken through lack of use, making stress incontinence more likely.

If you are experiencing symptoms of urinary leakage and would like help, please speak to any member of the CF team. You will also be routinely asked about leakage at annual review and on admission to the ward by the CF physiotherapist.

You may be referred to a gynaecology consultant for diagnosis and a specialist continence physiotherapist, if required, for advice and treatment to help reduce leakage.

The specialist continence physiotherapist will assess and give advice on an appropriate pelvic floor muscle re-education programme.

More advice on maintaining your pelvic floor muscles

- reduce your chances of becoming constipated by eating the recommended daily amount of dietary fibre (15 - 30g) and ensuring you keep well hydrated by drinking plenty of fluid (1.5 - 2 litres per day).
- some patients may try to drink less fluid because they think that this will reduce the possibility of leaking urine. However, if you are dehydrated you are potentially more likely to suffer with increased urinary leakage and sometimes kidney failure.
- keep your caffeinated drink intake to a minimum (caffeine is present in drinks such as coffee, chocolate, tea and coca cola) as these can make bladder symptoms worse. Gradually, try and reduce your caffeine consumption.
- try to avoid going to the toilet 'just in case' when your bladder is not sufficiently full. Voiding urine too often can cause the bladder to reduce in size so that it is not able to hold so much fluid.
If your bladder requires emptying more frequently than once in 2 hours, bladder retraining is suggested to increase the time interval between visits to the toilet. Try to stop your urge to go to the toilet by contracting your pelvic floor muscles or by distracting yourself by performing another task.
- although you should try not to pass urine too frequently, equally you should not avoid going to the toilet for long periods of time (as a guide you should void urine at least once every 3 hours. This will help prevent the occurrence of a bladder infection which might be associated with urine being stored for too long in the bladder).
- try to maintain your weight within the recommended range for your height and build. This will help in reducing the stress placed on the pelvic floor muscles.
- try not to cough unnecessarily. Attempt to suppress coughing (e.g. by doing relaxed breathing, swallowing or sipping cool water) until you feel as if you will definitely clear any sputum.
- ask for assistance when carrying heavy loads.

Contact us:

If you have any questions about any of the information provided in this leaflet, please contact the Cystic Fibrosis Physiotherapy Team on: 0121 424 1577 or 0121 424 2000 and ask switchboard to bleep 2742 or 2854.

Information for Patients

Additional Information Sources:

For more information on all aspects of living with Cystic Fibrosis you can visit the Cystic Fibrosis Trust web site at : www.cftrust.org.uk.

For local news and events the West Midlands Regional Cystic Fibrosis Unit based at Heartland Hospital has its own website at: www.heartlandscf.org.uk .

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Our commitment to confidentiality

We keep personal and clinical information about you to ensure you receive appropriate care and treatment. Everyone working in the NHS has a legal duty to keep information about you confidential.

We will always ask you for your consent if we need to use information that identifies you. We will share information with other parts of the NHS to support your healthcare needs, and we will inform your GP of your progress unless you ask us not to. You can help us by pointing out any information in your records which is wrong or needs updating.

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may want to ask: