What is the urinary system?

Urine (pee) is made in the kidneys. It flows through tubes called ureters. From the ureters urine travels down to the bladder. Urine is stored in the bladder until it leaves the body through another tube called the urethra. Small thick muscles around the urethra act as a sphincter to control the flow of urine.
What is urinary incontinence?
Incontinence happens when a person can’t control the flow of their urine. It is not a disease. It is a symptom of a problem in the body. Incontinence affects men and women of all ages. There are treatments that can help.

What causes incontinence?
› Pelvic floor muscles losing their tone
› Surgery
› Certain diseases, such as Parkinson’s disease
› Birth defects
› Spinal cord injuries
› Urinary tract infections
› Side effects of certain medications
› Fistulas (an opening between two organs)
› Overactive bladder

If you have any questions, please ask.
We are here to help you.
Common types of incontinence

Stress incontinence
This type of incontinence causes urine to leak when you sneeze, cough, laugh, jog, or do anything that causes pressure or stress on the abdominal muscles.

Urge incontinence
This happens when pressure in the bladder suddenly increases and exceeds the pressure in the urethra. Signs include a strong urge to urinate, urinating more often, urinating a lot at night, or leaking a little bit of urine.

Mixed incontinence
This is caused by a mixture of both stress incontinence and urge incontinence.

Overflow incontinence
The bladder never completely empties, but you don’t have the urge to pass urine, which then causes a leakage of urine. If you have a complete loss of bladder control, there will be a continuous leakage of urine.
Possible treatments
› Kegel exercises
› Bladder training
› Medication
› Injections
› Surgery
› Combination therapies

What can I do to help myself?
Watch what you drink.

- Drink 6-8 glasses of fluids each day unless your doctor tells you otherwise. Do not try to prevent incontinence by only drinking a small amount. Drinking small amounts will make your urine more concentrated (darker in colour). This can irritate the bladder lining, cause stones to form, and make the problem worse.

- Limit drinks containing alcohol and caffeine. Caffeinated drinks include: coffee, tea, colas, and cocoa. Your body will make more urine if you drink alcohol and caffeine. Drink very little fluids after 6 p.m., especially drinks with alcohol and caffeine.

Empty your bladder every 2 hours during the day.
Empty your bladder completely:
› After meals
› Before you go to bed
› Before you go out
› As soon as you arrive somewhere

Never ignore the urge to urinate.
The risk of infection goes up if urine is stored in the bladder too long.

Do pelvic floor exercises (Kegel exercises).
These exercises increase the strength of the pelvic floor muscles. Ask your nurse or doctor about Kegel exercises.

Use absorbent products.
• A variety of absorbent products are available.
• Ask your nurse to tell you about the different types.
• Menstrual pads don’t work as well, as they are not designed to hold urine.

Take care of your skin.
• Wash your skin after an episode of incontinence with mild soap and warm water.
• Pat skin dry. Do not rub.
• If you have skin breakdown, see your nurse or doctor.
Looking for more health information? This pamphlet and all our active patient pamphlets are searchable here:

http://library.cdha.nshealth.ca/chlibrary/Pamphlets

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources. For more information go to http://library.novascotia.ca

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