

Urine Leaks after Prostate Cancer Treatment

Urine leaks after surgery or radiation for prostate cancer are common.

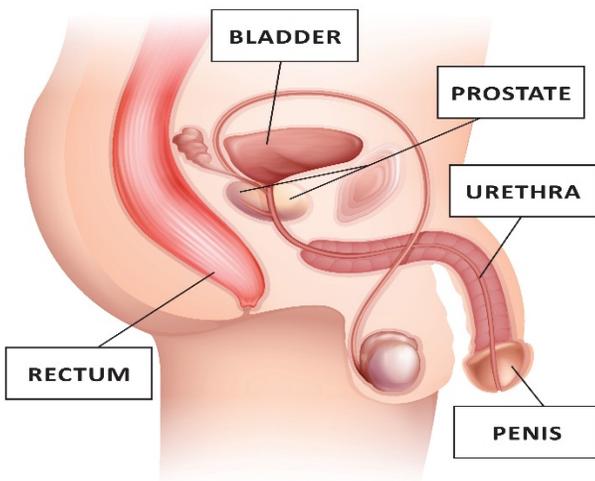
The medical term for this is incontinence (say: in KON ti nense). Men are often embarrassed by this common and treatable condition caused by prostate cancer treatments. Usually, the problem lasts just a short time. But, for some men, it continues to be a problem for months or years. Learn what causes the problem and what you can do about it.



How does prostate cancer treatment cause urine leaks?

How the urine control system works. Urine is stored in the *bladder* and then passes out of your body through the *urethra* (say: u REE thra), the tube that runs through the penis. The upper part of this tube goes through the *prostate*.

The prostate helps a man control his urine, along with the muscles right next to it. These muscles relax to let urine out and tighten once the bladder is empty. The prostate and muscles work together to control a man's urine.



Cancer treatments can cause trouble with the urine control system.

- With prostate cancer surgery, some of the muscles next to the prostate are removed. So, there are fewer muscles left to control urine flow.
- Radiation treatments can also damage the muscles that control urine flow. Radiation can also cause other problems such as pain with urine flow or trouble starting the flow. Find more information on the guide “Dealing with Urine Problems after Radiation.”

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Which men are most likely to have urine leaks?

Each man is different in his response to cancer treatment. Certain factors play a role in how quickly a man regains urine control, such as age, type of treatment, and overall health.

After surgery, many have some urine leakage for a short while. You may leak if you cough, sneeze, or strain yourself (like when you lift something), or change position all of a sudden. Some men regain urine control after surgery within a few days. Many take a few months. Most men have good control by 1 or 2 years after treatment. Only a few men never regain control. In most cases, the leaking stops without the need for special treatment.

- In about 9 men in 100, it doesn't get better. In this case you can use a pad to protect your clothes, or have special surgery. This will usually control the leakage. For 91 men out of 100, this is not necessary because the problems with leakage get better.
- Younger men usually have fewer problems controlling their urine after surgery.

After radiation treatment, urine leaking is much less likely than with surgery, although it can happen.

If I have urine leaks, what can I do about them?

Here are tips and tools that can help you manage symptoms and regain a sense of control.

Talk about the problem with your healthcare team and others close to you.

- *Talk with your doctor and nurse.* Ask if you can do special exercises to strengthen your muscles called Kegels. Stronger muscles may



help control leaking. Directions for Kegels are at the end of this guide.

You can also ask for a referral to a physical therapist (PT) who is trained to help people with urine leakage problems. Most people, even doctors, do not know this is a treatment option. The PT would follow a program called “pelvic floor rehabilitation” to help you gain better urine control.

Talk to others close to you such as a partner, family or friend. Share your feelings, even if you are embarrassed. It will bring some relief. Together, you may think of ways to better manage the situation so you can continue to enjoy social and family life.

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Watch what you drink and eat.

- *Limit or avoid caffeine and alcohol.* Both draw water out of your body tissues and create more urine. Remember that some sodas, teas, coffee, energy drinks, and chocolate contain caffeine. Try to drink water instead of these other beverages. Doctors recommend 8 to 10 glasses each day. If you have heart or kidney problems, ask your doctor or nurse how much you can drink.
- *Avoid foods that increase problems.* Spicy foods and high-acid foods such as tomatoes, oranges, and grapefruit increase urine problems for some men.

Maintain good bowel and bladder habits.

- *Get to and stick to a healthy weight.* If you need help losing weight, ask your healthcare team. Extra fat in the abdomen can press on the bladder and may increase urine leaking.
- *Maintain healthy bowel habits.* If you feel the urge to have a bowel movement, get to the bathroom. Don't hold it. Holding in a bowel movement puts pressure on the bladder and makes it harder to empty urine. Keep your stool soft by eating high fiber foods such as:
 - whole grain breads and cereals
 - nuts
 - raw fruits and vegetablesFiber supplements such as Metamucil, Benefiber or Citrucel also work to keep stool soft.
- *Train your bladder and empty it on a schedule.* Start by passing urine every hour whether you have the urge to go or not. Slowly increase the time between visits to the bathroom. After you pass urine, allow a little extra time for the last drops to fall before you zip up your pants.

- *Manage your sneezes!* If you feel a cough or sneeze coming and you're worried about leaking, cross your legs and do a Kegel.

Protect your bed and clothes.

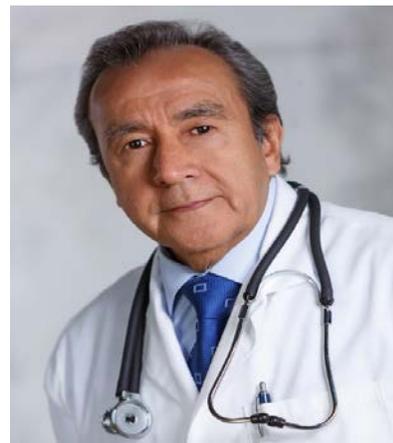
- *Protect your bed.* If needed, use a waterproof mattress cover or smaller disposable pads. If you need to pass urine during the night, keep a urinal next to your bed.
- *Protect your clothes.* Wear pads that absorb urine inside your underwear. Others won't notice them. Pads come in a range of sizes and vary in how much urine they absorb. Choose pads right for your body size and the amount of leakage you have. Keep an extra pad and maybe also an extra pair of underwear and trousers with you when you're away from home. An athletic or duffel bag can keep these private.
- *Protect your skin.* Keep skin clean and dry. Skin that stays wet from constant contact with urine can become tender, red, and even develop sores. For extra protection, use products that block moisture from the skin such as:
 - Petroleum jelly (Vaseline)
 - Zinc oxide
 - A&D ointmentNeutrogena makes a product called Aquaphor which protects the skin well, but it is expensive.
- *Don't let the leakage keep you from getting out of the house.* Plan for bathroom breaks and know where the bathroom is when you go somewhere. Getting out and about is important, so is being prepared for leakage.

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When should I see or call my doctor or nurse?

Call or talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- You have pain when you pass urine.
- You have blood in your urine.
- If leaking urine continues to bother you. There are medicines your doctor can prescribe to help and surgical treatments as well.



Kegels Exercise Program

Check with your doctor before doing Kegels! If your doctor says OK, these exercises will help you strengthen the muscles that control urine flow. This means you may have much better control.

Find the right muscles to strengthen. They are between your scrotum (balls) and anus (opening for bowel movements). You'll know which ones they are by trying to stop your urine in midstream and counting to three. These are also the muscles you tighten when you don't want to pass gas. When you squeeze or tighten the muscles, think of it as pulling your muscles up and in. You don't want to be pushing out or bearing down

Set up practice times. You can tighten and release these muscles without anyone knowing. So, you can do them while watching TV, reading,

driving, or any other time. Remember to exhale when you tighten your muscles.

A practice session lasts about 5 minutes. As you get better with Kegels, find 3 or 4 times during the day to practice.

Do both Long and Short Kegel exercises. See the directions below for how to include both Long and Short Kegel exercises. Start your session with Long Kegels. Build up to tightening your muscles for 10 seconds. When you can't hold your muscles tight for 10 seconds any longer, switch to Short Kegels.

Start slowly and build up. How strongly you tighten the muscles is more important than how many times you do it. Over time, you'll be able to tighten your muscles for a longer time and do more repetitions.

Kegels Exercise Program

Directions for Long Kegels (Start practice sessions with these.)

- *Tighten* the muscles between your scrotum and anus for 3-5 seconds. Then, *relax* the muscles for 3-5 seconds.
- Repeat this pattern 10 times.
- Your goal is to work up to tightening the muscles for 10 seconds, followed by relaxing for 10 seconds. It may take several weeks or longer to be able to do this.
- When you're tired, rest for 30 seconds, and then switch to short Kegels.

Directions for Short Kegels

Step 1: Tighten your muscles for 1 second and then relax them for 1 second.

Repeat this pattern 5 times.

Step 2: Rest for 10 seconds

Repeat steps 1 and 2 a total of 5 times.

You may want to keep track of your exercises on the Kegel log sheet on the next page.

Kegels Exercise Program / log sheet

Use this sheet to record one week of Kegels exercises. You should practice 3-4 times each day. There is space to record the number of

muscle squeezes you do, twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon/evening. You may print the sheet as needed.

DATE	TIME	Long Kegels # squeezes held between 3 – 10 seconds		Short Kegels # sets of 5 one-second squeezes	
	AM				
	PM				
	AM				
	PM				
	AM				
	PM				
	AM				
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This guide contains general information and is not meant to replace consultation with your doctor or nurse.

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