PATIENT HANDOUT

Options to Alleviate Urinary Incontinence

Treatment for urinary incontinence depends on the type, cause and severity of the condition. Your health care provider will suggest treatment approaches that are best for you. In most cases, clinicians recommend the least invasive treatments first.

In general, treatment options fall into the following four categories.

Behavioral Techniques

The following behavioral techniques and lifestyle changes can help manage types of urinary incontinence.

- ***Bladder retraining.*** This involves learning to delay urinating after you feel the urge to go. It helps to control urge and other types of incontinence.
- ***Scheduled toileting.*** Use the toilet according to the clock, rather than waiting for the need to go. For instance, go to the toilet every 2 to 4 hours as part of a routine.
- ***Pelvic floor muscle exercises.*** Kegel exercises can strengthen urinary sphincter and pelvic floor muscles to help treat stress and urge incontinence.
- ***Liquid and diet management.*** You may need to reduce or avoid alcohol, caffeine or acidic foods if they contribute to your incontinence. Weight reduction may also eliminate the problem.
- ***Electrical stimulation.*** With this procedure, a therapist temporarily inserts electrodes into the rectum or vagina to stimulate and strengthen pelvic floor muscles. It takes several months and multiple treatments to work. This approach is usually used for severe urge incontinence that doesn't respond to other behavioral techniques or medications.

Medications

The following drugs may be used to treat incontinence:

- ***Anticholinergic (antispasmodic) drugs.*** Used to calm an overactive bladder, these prescription medications may alleviate urge incontinence.
- ***Imipramine (Tofranil).*** This antidepressant relaxes the bladder muscle and contracts the smooth muscles at the bladder neck.
- ***Hormone replacement.*** A decrease in estrogen can cause skin changes in a woman's urethra and vagina, which may contribute to incontinence. Applying estrogen through a vaginal cream, ring or patch can relieve some symptoms. However, hormone replacement therapy may have serious risks and side effects.
- ***Antibiotics.*** If a urinary tract infection or an inflamed prostate gland (prostatitis) is causing your incontinence, your health care provider will prescribe antibiotics for treatment.

Devices

Several medical devices are designed to treat incontinence in women, including:

- ***Urethral inserts.*** These are small, tampon-like disposable devices that a woman can insert into her urethra to prevent urine leakage. When you feel the need to urinate, you can remove the device. They're available by prescription and aren't intended for daily use.
- ***Pessary.*** This is a stiff ring that a woman can insert into the vagina and wear all day, although women should remove it regularly for cleaning. The prescription device helps hold up the bladder to keep urine from leaking. It may help treat incontinence that results from a dropped (prolapsed) bladder or uterus.

Surgery

If other treatments don't work, surgery to remove an enlarged prostate gland, a tumor in the bladder or a uterine fibroid may be the final step. Various surgical techniques can also reposition a slipped bladder or uterus, or strengthen weakened urinary sphincter muscles.

If none of these treatments eliminates your incontinence or if you need help controlling your incontinence while undergoing treatment, several products can help with urine leakage. For instance, absorbent pads and protective garments include drip collectors, panty liners, adult diapers, plastic underwear and briefs with waterproof panels.

If you're experiencing incontinence because your bladder isn't emptying properly, your health care provider may recommend a catheter, a tube that's inserted into the urethra to collect urine. It connects to an external bag that needs to be emptied periodically.

Information adapted from The Mayo Clinic Home Page, Diseases and Conditions: Urinary Incontinence, located at www.mayoclinic.com

NOTES

Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.

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