

Controlling Incontinence after Stroke

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Incontinence after stroke is a very common side effect that alters your ability to control your bladder and bowel movements. If you're a stroke survivor, the most important thing for you to know is that incontinence is not your fault. It's an extremely common post-stroke side effect that can be treated.

What Is Incontinence?

According to the [Continence Foundation](#), incontinence is the involuntary loss of urine from the bladder or feces or wind from the bowel. There are varying degrees of incontinence from just a small leak to a complete loss. Incontinence after stroke occurs when a stroke affects the area of your brain that controls your bladder and bowels. Luckily problems with incontinence can go away on their own after a short amount of time. However, if they do not go away there are treatment options.

Tips for Dealing with Incontinence

Based on feedback from other stroke survivors, here are some useful tips for dealing with the symptoms of [incontinence](#):

- Add waterproof pads beneath bedsheets
- Protect furniture with plastic covers
- Keep an extra set of garments in all bathrooms
- Give yourself extra time to get to the bathroom
- Use undergarments that you don't mind tossing out
- Keep an extra set of clothes in your car
- Have hand wipes and sanitizer nearby at all times

These tips help you deal with the unavoidable side effects of incontinence. Now let's move onto some treatment options that can lessen the side effects.

Treatment for Incontinence

You can treat incontinence with or without exercise. Here are the different ways you can treat incontinence without exercise:

- **Urgency control** involves using deep breathing or complex mental tasks, like counting down from 100, to help you ignore your urgency to relieve yourself.
- **Avoiding coffee and alcohol**, which makes you produce more urine, can help prevent urinary incontinence.
- **Taking medication** can help reduce the amount of urine that your body produces and help reduce bowel movements to keep urges at bay and improve your control.
- **Making dietary changes to reduce constipation** can help as constipation worsens bowel incontinence. Adding stool softeners or laxatives while avoiding low fiber foods (like cheese) can also improve symptoms.
- **Losing weight** can help with incontinence as being overweight can affect your ability to control your bladder.

Exercises for Incontinence

Now let's move onto exercises that can help treat incontinence.

- **Bladder/bowel training** involves gradually retraining your bladder and bowels to hold more for longer. Start by setting specific times to go to the

restroom, and then each week increase the amount of time between each bathroom break.

- **Pelvic floor training (i.e. Kegel exercises)** can help you strengthen the muscles that control your bladder. To do this exercise, squeeze the muscles that you use to stop urinating for 3 seconds, then relax for 3 seconds. Continue this for 10 reps while adding one second on to each repetition.

These exercises will help increase the length of time between bathroom breaks and strengthen the muscles that control continence.

For more information on living with long-term incontinence, this leaflet from the [Stroke Association](#) is a great resource.