Urinary Incontinence in Cystic Fibrosis

Cystic Fibrosis Physiotherapist
Monash Medical Centre
246 Clayton Road
Clayton

Phone: 03 9594 2250
Fax: 03 9594 6225

**Introduction**
Urinary incontinence is a common occurrence in people with Cystic Fibrosis. Incontinence can affect both males and females of all ages with Cystic Fibrosis but is more common in females.

This handout aims to explain why urinary incontinence can occur in Cystic Fibrosis and the treatment to decrease its occurrence.

**What is Urinary Incontinence?**
Incontinence is the unintentional leakage of urine. It can be classed into two separate categories:

**Stress:**
Stress incontinence is when you leak urine at times when there is increased pressure inside your abdomen which in turn pushes down on the bladder. Activities which can cause stress incontinence include coughing, sneezing, laughing, exercise or lifting.

**Urge:**
Urge incontinence is when the bladder muscle is very sensitive and can cause the bladder to feel fuller than it actually is. This means the bladder contracts too soon and not when you want to. This can cause you to need the toilet suddenly and can cause some leakage of urine.

People with Cystic Fibrosis tend to suffer from Stress Urinary incontinence as a result of repetitive coughing.

You can start in this position and as your pelvic floor contractions improve you can progress to sitting or standing.

**How do I do my Pelvic Floor Training?**
Squeeze and draw in the muscles around your back passage and front passage at the same time. You should have the sense of lifting them up inside you each time you squeeze. Hold the contraction for 8 seconds and then let it go.

Repeat as many times as you can up to a limit of 8-12 times.

While performing your pelvic floor exercises remember:
- Keep breathing
- Only squeeze and lift
- Do NOT tighten your buttocks
- Keep your thighs relaxed.

It is important that you are performing your pelvic floor exercises correctly. Often when you first begin your muscles can fatigue quickly. We encourage you to do fewer quality squeezes rather than many halfhearted ones.

**What if my leaking persists?**
If your leaking persists despite trying these exercises discuss it with your Cystic Fibrosis team. There are continence specialists who are available to offer advice, assessment and treatment of your leakage. Your Cystic Fibrosis team can provide you with the required referral to be reviewed by these teams.
How do I do my Pelvic Floor Training?

Now that you have found your pelvic floor muscles it's time to get working! You can practise in a comfortable relaxed position such as lying on your back with your knees bent.

The Pelvic Floor

The pelvic floor is a layer of muscles which stretch like a hammock from your tail bone at the back to the pubic bone at the front.

It helps to support all the organs in your abdomen as well as helping you to control your bladder and bowel function.

Why does coughing make me leak urine?

Coughing creates a lot of pressure in your chest and abdomen. This pressure pushes down on your pelvic floor and it needs to contract with each cough to prevent you leaking urine. The repetitive nature of coughing can mean that the pelvic floor muscle fatigues and is unable to contract enough therefore leading to leakage or urine.
How can I stop leaking urine?
The easiest way to stop leaking urine is to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. Pelvic floor muscles can be trained just like all other muscles and once you learn how to perform the exercises you can perform them anywhere without anyone knowing you are doing them. Your Cystic Fibrosis physiotherapist or a specialist continence physiotherapist will be able to aid you in this process.

Who do I speak to if I have a problem with stress incontinence?
If you have any questions about stress incontinence or your pelvic floor, speak to a member of your CF team. Your Physiotherapist can help create a program for you to ensure the best health for your pelvic floor.

We know it can be embarrassing to discuss such issues but remember that the problem may be more common than you think. There are ways of helping to decrease the occurrence of leakage of urine so do not be afraid of asking.

Where are my Pelvic Floor Muscles?
Sit or lie down, tighten the muscle around your back passage and front passage as if you are trying to stop yourself passing wind and urine at the same time. Now relax this muscle. Repeat this process until you are sure you have the correct muscle.

It can be difficult to not turn on other muscles in the area – we want to isolate your pelvic floor as much as possible. Don’t:
- Pull your tummy in
- Squeeze your legs together
- Squeeze your buttocks
- Hold your breath