

# Incontinence can be treatable

*Contributed by Dr. Mohammed Akl, a urogynecologist at Banner Gateway Medical Center.*

**Question:** What are the main types of urinary incontinence and what are the treatment options?

**Answer:** Urinary incontinence, loss of bladder control, is a common and often embarrassing problem. The two main types of urinary incontinence are stress and urge incontinence.

Stress incontinence is leakage of urine when you exert pressure (stress) on your bladder by laughing, coughing, sneezing, exercising or lifting. It affects 10 to 20 percent of the general population in the United States. This condition can be due to weakness of the muscle that controls the urine or due to changes of the angle of the urethra, or "dropped urethra." This can be easily treated by an outpa-

tient urethral sling procedure. The procedure has high success rate. Patients usually go home the same day of the procedure. Pelvic-floor exercises are another non-surgical option.

Urge incontinence is a sudden, intense urge to urinate, followed by an involuntary loss of urine before making it to the bathroom. This is due to abnormal spasms of the bladder wall muscle. It is estimated that approximately 16 percent of women suffer from this condition. There are bladder medications that act to relax the bladder wall and prevent abnormal contractions. Patients who do not respond to medications may be candidates for nerve stimulation therapy.

Patients are often hesitant to discuss bladder-control issues with their doctors due to the sensitive nature of the subject or thinking it might be a normal part of aging. However, bladder-control disorders can be relatively easy to treat.

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