

b&b

Bladder & Bowel
Community

LOVE YOUR GUSSET!

A STRESS URINARY INCONTINENCE FACT SHEET FOR
WOMEN AND TEENAGERS



WHAT IS STRESS URINARY INCONTINENCE?

GET TO KNOW YOUR GUSSET - THE SCIENCE BIT

Stress urinary incontinence (SUI) is defined as a sudden loss of urine (wee) during normal day to day activities. You may also hear it referred to as bladder weakness or a weak bladder, but whatever it's called, it's all the same thing, with the same unwanted result – leakage.

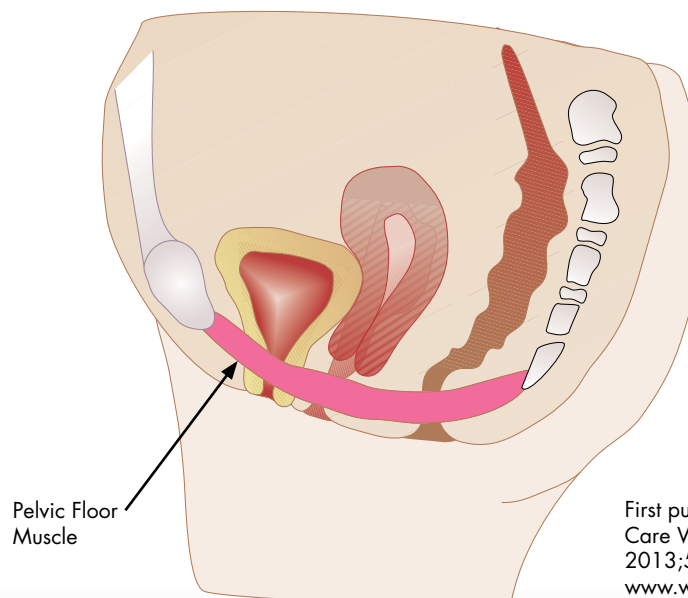
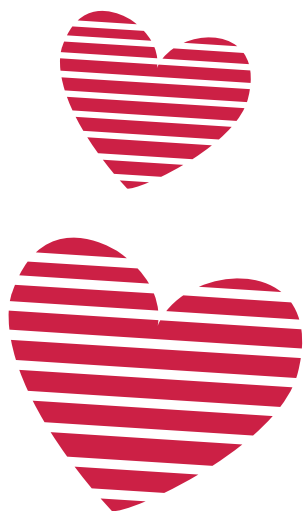
SUI is a common problem, especially amongst women and is thought to affect about one in three women in the UK. Leakage occurs when the bladder is under pressure, for example when you exercise, laugh or cough, and when the pelvic floor muscles or sphincter are damaged or too weak to prevent urination. The pelvic floor muscles are layers of muscle that are like a hammock, stretching from the pubic bone to the bottom of the spine (coccyx) and from side to side. These muscles hold the bladder and bowel in place and help to stop leaks. See the pink area in the diagram below.

The sphincter is a circular muscle that goes around the urethra (the tube that urine comes out of) and squeezes as the bladder fills up to create a seal so that urine can't leak out. If this becomes damaged this can result in leakage.

LOVE
YOUR
GUSSET!

Did you know the pelvic floor has important functions, including:

- supporting your pelvic organs, especially when you are standing or exercising
- supporting your bladder to help keep the outlet from it closed, and actively squeezing the urethra when you cough or sneeze to help prevent leaking
- controlling wind and helping you "hold on" with your bowels



First published in Primary
Care Women's Health Journal
2013;5(1):20-22.
www.womenshealthj.com

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE SUI?

If you wee when you;

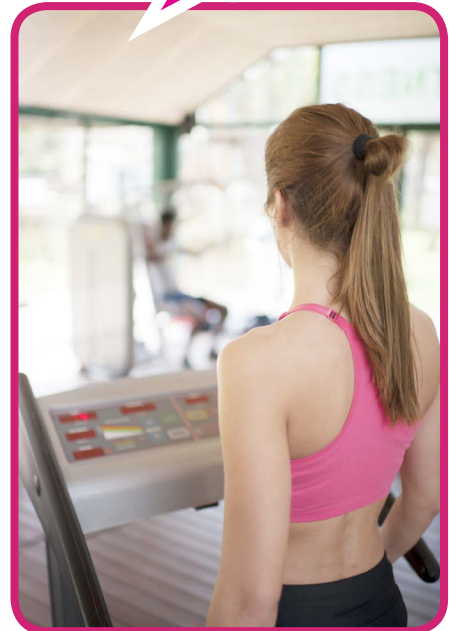
- laugh
- cough
- sneeze
- walk
- exercise
- or lift something then you may have SUI.

SUI can affect women of all ages. For a few women this can be a problem from a young age. For the majority, SUI begins around the child bearing years and can become an increasing problem with age.

The good news is that most people with this problem can be helped and some people can be cured completely.

Why do I
wee when I'm
running?

I can't
exercise now!



If you're still unsure
why you leak, imagine this...
you are holding a balloon full of
water and your fingers are keeping
the water inside by squeezing the
bit you blow in. When you squeeze
tightly the water doesn't leak out, but
if you relax your fingers a little, and
you squeeze the balloon suddenly,
water starts to dribble out.
This shows how you leak when
you sneeze, cough or lift
something heavy.

LOVE
YOUR
GUSSET!

WHAT CAUSES SUI & HOW CAN I PREVENT IT?

LOVE
YOUR
GUSSET!

If the muscles of the pelvic floor or sphincter are weakened or damaged they may struggle to stop you from weeing when they come under pressure. These muscles can become weakened by;

- Increased pressure on your tummy for example when you're pregnant or very overweight.
- Nerve damage during childbirth due to a prolonged delivery or large baby.
- Multiple pregnancies (vaginal delivery).
- Constipation.
- Persistent chronic cough from smoking, chronic bronchitis or asthma.
- Certain medications.
- Hormonal deficiency.

Look after your gusset – try these self-help tips!

- Do daily pelvic floor muscle exercises – exercise fact sheets are available from the Bladder & Bowel Community website so there is no excuse, order yours today.
- Cut back on your caffeine intake as it can irritate your bladder and make problems worse. Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, cola and other fizzy drinks. Why not give it a go and switch to de-caffeinated now.
- Try to drink at least 1 to 1.5 litres (around six to eight glasses) of fluid a day. This can be any kind of fluid but not alcohol or caffeine drinks!
- Lose weight - If you need help, speak to your GP who can refer you to a dietician for extra support and advice.
- If you smoke, try to stop or at least cut down, especially if you have a persistent cough, which can weaken your pelvic floor muscles.
- Constipation can increase your risk of leakage as the bowel swells up and pushes against your bladder – speak to your GP about measures you can take to help prevent constipation.
- Eat a balanced and healthy diet and take plenty of regular exercise. Not only will this help you lose weight, prevent constipation and other bowel problems; it will improve all round general health which can only be a good thing.



WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

The good news is that there is lots of help available and some very simple things that can be done to get your gusset back into full working order and stop those leaks. The first thing you should do is see your GP for an assessment of your symptoms, or if you prefer you can also self-refer to an NHS continence clinic (details available from B&BC).

Your health professional will first recommend the following treatment options:

- Lifestyle changes – such as following a healthy diet, losing weight or stopping smoking
 - Pelvic floor muscle exercises
 - Bladder training – retraining your bladder to hold more wee for longer periods of time by gradually increasing the time between toilet visits
-
- Medication
 - Surgery (always a last resort)

Helpful tips

1. In the short-term having a spare pair of knickers in your bag can help confidence.
2. If you are going to exercise or you know you won't be able to find a toilet, consider using a continence pad in your knickers as a temporary measure.
3. If you are going to lift something heavy, remember to clench your pelvic floor muscles first.
4. You can buy continence pads from most supermarkets or chemists. Try not to use sanitary towels as they are not suitable for wee.

Further support, resources and contacts:

B&BC can provide further support and information on stress urinary incontinence and other bladder and bowel related problems, including information on lifestyle changes, pelvic floor muscle exercises, bladder retraining and other treatment solutions.

Women can contact the **Bladder and Bowel Community (B&BC)** for further information and support.

You can also visit the following website for more information:

Bladder & Bowel Community - www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org