

INCONTINENCE: **WHAT CAN BE DONE IN PHYSIOTHERAPY?**

Approximately 1.6 million Canadians suffer from urinary incontinence or from various conditions that are related to this problem. Women are more at risk after giving birth, during menopause or as a result of frequent urinary infections.

There are several different types of incontinence, of which certain kinds can be treated in physiotherapy.

Women who have leaking of urine while coughing, sneezing or during physical effort suffer from “stress incontinence”. In this condition, there is usually associated weakness of the muscles of the pelvic floor. These muscles originate from the pubic area and attach to the coccyx, surrounding the ureter, the vagina and the rectum.

In addition to muscles of the pelvic floor, there are other muscles that are located between the rectum and the front of the pelvis. These muscles hold up the internal organs, including the bladder, the uterus and the rectum. Women that have a weakness of these muscles tend to have less isolated control of the pelvic floor and have less muscle endurance, which may provoke loss of urine.

Certain physiotherapists have specific training for the treatment of problems of the pelvic floor and can, amongst other things, teach you exercises to strengthen these muscles. With the help of a biofeedback unit, the physiotherapist will be able to know exactly which muscles are weak and can teach you exercises that are specific to your problem.

There are other problems for which a physiotherapist can help, such as urinary frequency and/or urgency. Often, urinary urgency is associated with a weakness of the pelvic floor muscles. Normally, when we sense the need to urinate but the bathroom is not close by, we contract the muscles of the pelvic floor. This sends a message to the bladder that it should not contract yet. If the pelvic floor is weak, this message is not sent as efficiently. An increase in urinary frequency may develop due to leakage of urine, where women go to the washroom “in case” in an attempt to avoid leaking. This problem can also be treated in physiotherapy.