



Physiotherapists:  
The Body Specialists

# Physio Tips

## INCONTINENCE

Physiotherapy Association of BC

**Incontinence – difficulty with bladder control – dramatically affects many aspects of life for many Canadians**

This treatable condition limits life choices and prevents sufferers from taking on new challenges.

Whatever the cause with physiotherapy treatment incontinence can often be improved resolved or managed successfully.

Physiotherapy: Effective Treatment for Urinary Incontinence

**Stress incontinence** is the leakage of urine during activities such as coughing, sneezing, lifting or exercising. It is often caused by pelvic floor muscles that are weak or used incorrectly.

Childbirth, lifestyle, hormone changes, certain medical conditions and surgery are some events that can bring about these changes in the pelvic floor. Regardless of the cause, ***stress incontinence can be treated or managed successfully by physiotherapists.***

**Urge incontinence** is the leakage of urine as soon as one feels the need to go to the bathroom. It can be accompanied by the need to pass urine frequently, which may involve repeated trips to the toilet even during the night.

Urge incontinence can be caused by bladder infections or constipation, poor bladder or bowel habits or other lifestyle factors. It can also be a side effect of stroke, spinal cord injury, Multiple Sclerosis or Parkinson's disease. Regardless of the cause, ***urge incontinence can be treated or managed successfully by physiotherapists.***

Some people experience both stress and urge incontinence at different times or in different circumstances.

Physiotherapy offers an effective treatment option. Physiotherapy is a non-invasive treatment for incontinence. Alternate medical interventions are medication and surgery.

Physiotherapy treatment focuses on rehabilitation of pelvic floor muscle control, strength, endurance, and the ability to coordinate these aspects into everyday activities.

Treatment is tailored to the individual patient. Treatment varies according to the type of incontinence and the individual's unique needs.

Physiotherapy interventions may include biofeedback; electrotherapy; instruction on behavioural changes regarding diet, bowel and bladder habits; bladder restraining techniques; the use of pessaries (internal assistive devices).

### **PTs: Pelvic Floor Rehabilitation**

Successful pelvic floor rehabilitation is central to conservative treatment of incontinence. Research has demonstrated that with only verbal and/or written instruction 40-50% of women are unable to correctly perform a pelvic floor muscle contraction (Kegel exercise), even when they think they have mastered the skill. Not only is correct pelvic floor function important in maintaining continence, it is also required for pelvic organ support, to maintain correct posture and to perform pain free low back movements.

### **PTs: Experts in Assessment**

The pelvic floor must also work in coordination with the diaphragm when breathing. If pelvic floor function is not optimum in one or more of these aspects, continence will be compromised.



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As successful pelvic floor rehabilitation in the treatment of incontinence is critical, it is

important to have pelvic floor muscle control, pelvic floor muscle function assessed by a qualified health care practitioner knowledgeable in bladder control, pelvic floor muscle function and muscle rehabilitation. Physiotherapists are experts in this field.

### **PTs: Knowledge & Expertise**

University educated physiotherapists with postgraduate continence training understand the anatomy and physiology of the urogenital and lower gastrointestinal systems, including micturition and defecation mechanisms. Working from an evidence-based perspective, physiotherapists are able to combine their knowledge of bowel and bladder control mechanisms with their expertise in muscle physiology, strength, endurance and exercise progression.

PTs: Integrating Treatment & Daily Living  
Physiotherapists are the experts at integrating treatment into daily living activities. Treatment is provided in a manner that enhances the health and function of the pelvic floor in all of its roles, thereby maximizing the outcome for the person struggling with incontinence and improving their quality of life.

### **Did you know?**

Contrary to myth, adult incontinence occurs in young and old and is not a normal process of aging.

Incontinence affects many aspects of life:

- work
- social activities
- recreation
- travel
- sex

Incontinence affects 30 to 55% of women and 15% of men. Physiotherapy offers them an effective treatment.

### **Treatments for Incontinence**

There are many different treatments for incontinence; your health care professional can tell you which ones will work best for your situation.

A physiotherapist who is trained in incontinence treatment can help you with muscle strengthening exercises, dietary management, environmental changes and bladder retraining.

Working closely with physicians, physiotherapists help people in hospitals and clinics. You'll also find physiotherapists in neighbourhood schools, public health units, home and long term care programs and sports medicine clinics.

Physiotherapists are experts in movement and mobility, body mechanics, muscles and joints. They will help develop an exercise program specially-tailored to your needs, putting together the right combination of activities to improve physical fitness and avoid injury.

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