

### **Self Help for Urinary Incontinence**

**Among those completing this 8 week program, two out of three patients noted 70% improvement or better.**

#### **What are we trying to do?**

We are trying to gain control of your bladder and decrease or stop urine loss. You need to find and build up your levator muscle. This funnel shaped muscle supports your bladder, vagina and rectum. By gaining control of the muscle, building up its strength and contracting it during times of stress urine loss can be improved or eliminated.

#### **How do I find the muscle?**

Two ways are easiest: first just start and stop urinating. The muscle that you will be contracting to do this is the levator muscle. The second approach is to insert a finger into your vagina and try to contract the muscle without tightening your abdominal muscles. If you are doing this properly, you will feel the tightening of the levator muscle with your vaginal finger.

#### **What is the 8 week program?**

**First two weeks:** 3 sessions of levator muscle exercises daily. Each session consists of 15 repetitions of 2- to 4-second contractions with equal periods of relaxation. You should do 1 session each of lying, sitting, and standing, and whenever possible integrate the exercises into other daily activities. Once daily you should practice interruption or slowing of the urinary stream during voiding. To help you to gauge your progress, keep a diary of how many episodes of urine loss you experience each day and whether they are "mild", "moderate" or "severe".

**Second two weeks:** You should begin to use "stress strategies" to prevent urine leakage. Specifically, contract your levator muscles during any activity that usually results in leakage (eg, coughing, sneezing, lifting, standing up from a chair). If you forget to use the stress strategy and experience urine leakage during an activity, tighten your pelvic floor muscles immediately; this should strengthen the habit of using your muscles in the future. You should also manage the sensation of urgency using the "urge strategy". Instead of rushing to the toilet, which increases pressure on the bladder and exposes you to visual cues that can trigger incontinence, you should stand or sit still, relax the entire body, and contract pelvic floor muscles repeatedly to diminish urgency, inhibit bladder contractions, and prevent urine loss. When urgency subsides, you may proceed to the toilet without rushing.

**Last four weeks:** The home exercise regimen is adjusted by gradually increasing the duration of each contraction to a maximum of 10 seconds, with an equal period of relaxation between contractions. Continue to keep your record of urine loss and review how much you have improved, try to see what circumstances are most troublesome to you.

**What if this program is not effective enough?** There are two strategies that should help and still allow you to avoid surgery or medication. The first involves building up levator muscle strength using tampon shaped vaginal weights. These are available via mail order and are called TIMM vaginal weights. You may purchase them from Amazon.com or other vendors, by searching for “vaginal weights”. Look for graded Kegel exercise weights. If this is not effective, there is a device that will both give you feedback as to how well you are contracting your muscles as well as use a small electrical current to cause the muscles to contract and strengthen. This is called the InTone device. You can learn more at [www.incontrolmedical.com](http://www.incontrolmedical.com) This will cost several hundred dollars but may enable you to avoid an operation. We are authorized to fit and instruct you for this device.

If these approaches are not effective, we can refer you for specialized Physical Therapy.

**When do I need to follow up with my doctor?** If this is effective, we would like to hear from you by phone so that we can record this in your chart and also so that we have a sense of how successful this approach is for our patients. If you do not make any improvement in 4 weeks or do not notice satisfactory improvement after 8 weeks, please call our office and arrange for a follow up visit so that we may re-assess you and move on to next steps.