

Quiz: What's Your Bladder Health IQ?

The first step to treating your bladder leakage is understanding basic facts about bladder health. Test your knowledge with this quick quiz.

Q: True or False: The phrase "urinary tract infection" refers to a condition where bacteria are growing only in the bladder.

A: The answer is False. According to the American Urological Association Foundation, a urinary tract infection can happen in the kidneys or the bladder. In general, a healthy bladder doesn't have bacteria; however, bacteria are on your skin and are present in large amounts in the rectal area and in your stool. Sometimes, bacteria can find their way into your urinary tract and move up the urethra and into the bladder. In most cases, the bladder can rid itself of these germs but if bacteria remain in the bladder, they can begin to grow there, causing an infection. The infection triggers inflammation and this inflammation can cause pain in your abdomen and pelvic area, and you may feel the need to urinate more often. When you try to urinate, only a few drops may come out and/or you may experience burning. You may also be unable to control your urine and it may be cloudy or have a bad odor. If the infection goes untreated, it can spread to your kidneys. Signs that this has happened include back pain under the lower ribs, a high fever, chills, and a generally sick feeling. This infection can damage the kidneys and if the infection gets into your blood, it can be life-threatening. You should seek medical care immediately if you experience any of these symptoms.

Q: True or False: Blood in your urine can be a sign of bladder cancer.

A: The answer is True. The American Cancer Society says that blood in your urine can be a sign of bladder cancer, as can a change in your bladder habits. Other signs might include having to urinate more often or feeling that you need to urinate but are unable to do so. These symptoms can indicate problems other than cancer, but it's still important to have it checked out by a physician. If you are diagnosed with bladder cancer, the physician will begin "staging" the cancer, which means identifying how far in your body the cancer has spread. This is essential because your treatment and your outlook for recovery are based on the stage of your cancer. Bladder cancer is most often labeled using Roman numerals 0 to IV (0 to 4). In general, the lower the number, the less your cancer has spread. Insist that your doctor explain your stage in a way that you can understand so that together you can choose the best treatment for your case.

Q: True or False: Urinary incontinence, being unable to hold your urine, is a normal part of aging.

A: The answer is False. Bladder leakage is not a normal part of aging, and it's not something that you just have to learn to live with. According to the National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse, older women do experience more urinary

incontinence than younger women, but incontinence is not an inevitable result of aging. Urinary incontinence, or bladder leakage, is a medical condition and it occurs because of problems with the muscles or nerves involved in holding or releasing urine. When you urinate, muscles in the wall of your bladder contract, forcing urine out of the bladder. At the same time, sphincter muscles surrounding your urethra relax, letting urine pass from the bladder into the urethra and out of your body. Leakage occurs when your bladder muscles suddenly contract or the sphincter muscles are not strong enough to hold back the urine. Women of any age who are experiencing any type of bladder leakage should consult a medical professional. Once the causes are identified, there are many nonsurgical treatments available that may reduce or even eliminate your leakage.

Q: True or False: Fixing a prolapsed, or sagging, bladder requires surgery.

A: The answer is False. According to the American Urological Association Foundation, behavior therapies such as exercises to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor may cure mild cases of prolapse. More severe cases might require treatments such as estrogen replacement therapy, electrical stimulation, biofeedback, or a pessary (vaginal support device). Surgery is usually reserved for prolapse cases that aren't improved by using a pessary. Bladder prolapse happens when the "hammock" of supportive pelvic floor muscles and ligaments that hold the bladder in place are weakened and/or stretched, allowing the back of the bladder to sag through this layer of tissues and into the vagina. This sagging of the bladder can happen for many reasons but the most common one is stress on the "hammock" during childbirth. Heavy lifting, chronic coughing, constipation, often straining to pass stool, obesity, menopause, and previous pelvic surgery are other possible causes. Symptoms that may indicate a prolapsed bladder include frequent urination or urge to urinate; stress incontinence; not feeling bladder relief immediately after urinating; frequent urinary tract infections; discomfort or pain in the vagina, pelvis, lower abdomen, groin, or lower back; heaviness or pressure in the vaginal area; painful intercourse; or tissue protruding from the vagina that may be tender and/or bleeding.

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