



Constant pit stops?

How to keep urinary incontinence from ruining your trip

BY JESSICA GOODMAN

Visiting grandchildren or going to an exotic location are among the many joys of the holiday season. But suppose you have urinary incontinence? What if you have an accident because you couldn't find a bathroom when you needed it? Suppose you need to visit a bathroom frequently? Many older people simply avoid travel because of these fears, but there are ways to make travel easier and more fun for people with incontinence.

Why do I have incontinence?

"There are a number of causes of incontinence, each with its own specific treatments, but whatever the cause, incontinence is undoubtedly more common as we age," says Eugene Park, MD, a board-certified urological surgeon at Urology Specialists of Virginia at Stony Point.

Stress urinary incontinence is the most common form in women and is due to relaxation of the muscles supporting the bladder. When the pressure inside the abdomen increases, as with sneezing, coughing, laughing or exercising, leakage may occur. This leakage usually comes in little spurts.

Urge incontinence – when you have to find a bathroom right NOW – is caused by an overactive bladder muscle. This can happen in either men or women, and while it's a little more common in people with other problems of aging such as diabetes, Parkinson's or stroke, it can also happen to healthy seniors.

Men with enlarged prostate glands may have overflow incontinence. The urine flow can be blocked and when the bladder is completely full, leakage will occur.

How is it treated?

Treatments are based on individual patient needs and the cause of the incontinence, and they typically fall into several categories such as bladder training, medications and, in some cases, surgery.

You should start bladder training several weeks before your trip. Go to the bathroom whenever you have the chance, even if you don't feel the urge. Kegel exercises – alternating the muscles that stop urine flow by tightly squeezing and then relaxing them – can help with control as the muscles get stronger. No one knows that you're doing them, so you can exercise at your desk, in your car or anywhere else!

"Surgery may be the best treatment in some patients, and we are living in a golden age of surgery," explains Dr. Park, a recognized pioneer in the use of the da Vinci [robotic] Surgical System in urological surgery.

"Most urological surgery is done with minimally invasive techniques, meaning tiny incisions or no incisions at all. The da Vinci [robotic] Surgical System – which we have pioneered in urological surgery – is the next step in safety and comfort."

Are there other things I can do so that I'm not afraid to leave my house?

Yes. Be sure to bring adequate supplies for your trip and put clean underwear and plastic bags in your purse or carry-on bag. Limit your fluid intake, but be sure not to get dehydrated. Request an aisle seat near a lavatory if you are flying. There are several websites that can help you locate public bathrooms, both on interstates and internationally.

"Don't despair and definitely don't plan to stay home this holiday season. With some planning and good care, you will be good to go!" says Dr. Park. ■



Eugene L. Park, MD, is board certified by the American Board of Urology and specializes in all aspects of general urology, including urologic cancers of the kidney, prostate and bladder. He also specializes in incontinence and kidney stones. Dr. Park was elected by his peers for inclusion in "Best Doctors in America" from 2011 to 2012 and is a physician with Urology Specialists of Virginia.

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Vivek Sharma, MD
Colonial Orthopaedics
804.526.5888
colonialorthopaedics.com

Eugene Park, MD
Urology Specialists of Virginia Inc.
804.323.0226
urologyspecialistsva.com

Eddie Edwards
MEDARVA Health Section Editor
804.775.4500
stonypointsc.com