

VOA Special English Science Report

URINARY INCONTINENCE

This is Bill White with the VOA Special English Science Report.

Millions of people around the world suffer from a condition called urinary incontinence. Liquid waste leaks from the bladder uncontrollably.

People who suffer this condition are of all ages, sexes and races. Many people believe it develops because they are growing older. They think nothing can be done about it. Experts say this is wrong. Doctors say urinary incontinence can be treated and even cured.

Urinary incontinence can be caused by several disorders. These include infections of the urinary system: an enlarged prostate gland or other tissues, growths on the spinal cord. The problem also can be caused by diseases such as diabetes or multiple sclerosis, low hormone levels, medicines, or weakness in the muscle that keeps the bladder closed.

Some kinds of incontinence can be treated with drugs. For example, the hormone estrogen can help the muscle of the bladder close more easily. Drugs that help people breathe easily also affect proteins which help close the muscle. And some drugs can shrink the prostate gland if that is what is causing the problem.

Other treatments include exercises to strengthen muscles that can help the patient control the bladder. Another treatment involves placing collagen in tissues surrounding the tube through which urine passes. Collagen is an animal

protein that helps muscles stay closed.

Operations also can treat urinary incontinence. Doctors can tighten the tissue that lies on top of the weak muscle by sewing it to nearby ligaments. Other operations create support for the tube through which the urine passes. This also can prevent the loss of liquid waste.

Another kind of treatment involves placing a needle under the skin in the leg above the ankle. A small electric current is passed through it. This affects a nerve in the back that helps control the bladder.

Doctors say people suffering from urinary incontinence probably should not have foods and drinks that are known to affect the bladder. These liquids include alcohol, fruit juice and anything containing caffeine. Foods that can make incontinence worse include tomatoes, spices, sugar, honey and chocolate.

This VOA Special English Science Report was written by Nancy Steinbach. This is Bill White.

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