

Urinary Incontinence / Growing Older

Carol: Hello...I'm Carol and I'm delighted to be here today – at *Women of Hope*, our program especially for women. How are you doing, Tammy?

Tammy: I'm doing well thank you, and it's great to be here again with you. How was your morning?

Carol: Hectic as usual. You know, I realize that as I am growing older, I am not able to do as much as I could earlier.

Tammy: Me too. I get tired more easily and could do with some help. You know, to be honest, I sometimes worry about growing old. It comes with so many health problems, doesn't it?

Carol: Oh yes. Besides menopause, when you stop having periods, your joints ache, your bones become weak, and you tire more easily.

Tammy: And then there's urinary incontinence. I'm not looking forward to that.

Carol: No, neither am I... But it's a very important issue that we need to think about so we can be prepared if it ever happens to us. Stay with us friend. Jenny is with us today and she is going to talk about this very common problem that most of us really don't want to talk about.

Tammy: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. Hi Jenny. Thanks for being here.

Jenny: Have you ever been embarrassed when you coughed, or even laughed too much...and you wet your pants a little bit? It's embarrassing isn't it, but we need to talk about it. And you know something...it is more common than you think. Women all over the world have faced this problem called 'Urinary Incontinence.' Often, their embarrassment prevents them from talking to a doctor about it. But we'll talk about it, shall we? How else can we make ourselves better?

Carol: So tell us, Jenny, what is incontinence?

Jenny: A person has urinary incontinence when she has lost some control of her bladder. It mostly affects women, causing symptoms such as mild leaking to uncontrollable wetting.

Carol: Why does this happen?

Jenny: It often happens as people get older, but it is not the only reason. Understandably as we grow older our body changes. The bladder may not be able to hold as much as before...so you may find you want to urinate more frequently. But there are other reasons for urinary incontinence as well:

- when your bladder muscles are weak or overactive,
- when you reach menopause and you stop having periods, the walls of the vagina become thin and this can cause incontinence,
- when you give birth to a baby... your pelvic muscles are stretched and weakened, aren't they?...
- then there are certain health disorders such as diabetes or urinary tract infection,
- being overweight can also put pressure on the bladder and the muscles surrounding it,
- finally a really bad cough can also make your bladder weaker.

Carol: Yes, I've heard about that from older people. Are there different types?

Jenny: Yes, there are. **Stress incontinence** happens when stress from a laugh, sneeze, cough, or heavy lifting puts added strain on the bladder, causing urine to leak. In women, this is usually because muscles weakened by childbirth.

And there is **Urge urinary incontinence**. This happens when the need to urinate comes on so quickly that you might not quite make it to the bathroom in time. This sudden need to urinate can be very strong and happen often even if there is not much urine. Although this can happen at any age, it is more common among the elderly.

Overflow urinary incontinence occurs when a person does not feel the urge to urinate, but the bladder begins uncontrollably leaking small amounts of urine anyway. The bladder is too full, and the urine is escaping to relieve pressure. This condition occurs often in men. It can be caused by a tumor or an enlarged prostate gland blocking the flow of urine, preventing the bladder from ever emptying completely.

There are yet others whose urinary incontinence really has nothing to do with diseases or problems with the bladder. They just have a hard time getting to the bathroom on time, due to arthritis or some other problem that makes it difficult to move quickly. This is called **functional urinary incontinence**.

Carol: It sounds as though men suffer from incontinence too...

Jenny: A few of them do. They usually develop the problem if they have an enlarged prostate gland or if they have the prostate gland removed through surgery.

Carol: So, tell us again what symptoms we need to look out for?

Jenny: Well, as I said earlier, they are leakage of urine, pain when bladder fills or when urinating, dribbling after you finish or a feeling that you've not completely emptied your bladder. Other symptoms are urinating very often, waking up often with the need to urinate, bed wetting or leaking urine in your sleep. Some people find that they are not able to empty their bladder without straining. We also need be careful if we have frequent infections of the bladder. We talked about bladder infections another time. If you want to know more about these you can write to us at:

Carol: Do we need to see a doctor or health care worker if we have any of these symptoms?

Jenny: Yes, you most certainly should. It is embarrassing. But if you hide your condition, it may become worse and you may develop sores, a skin infection or rashes. And it may stop you from going out much or visiting with friends or family.

Carol: Jenny, is there a cure for incontinence?

Jenny: Well - incontinence can be treated and controlled, if not cured. Here's what to do: First, to make you feel safer you can wear absorbent underwear or pads. Then you can avoid certain foods such as coffee, alcohol, citrus fruits and dairy products... which are known to irritate the bladder. You should also avoid smoking as it can make the condition worse. Another way to control incontinence is to make sure you use the toilet at regular intervals. This may help you control the urge to urinate. At times the doctor may prescribe some medication.

Carol: Is there a way to prevent incontinence?

Jenny: Most doctors would recommend some exercises called the 'kegel' exercises. A man called Dr Kegel discovered how to do these helpful exercises. It is important to do these soon after a baby is born and after that on a regular basis for the rest of your life. These exercises are very simple and can be done anywhere, either standing or sitting. While you are at work or watching TV and even

when you are brushing your teeth. No one would need to know that you are doing them. That's how simple they are. Do you want to try them?

Carol: Sure ...we do!

Jenny: Well then, first you need to find out which muscles need to be strengthened. To do so I would suggest that you sit on a toilet with your legs slightly apart and start to urinate. After a few seconds, try to stop the stream of urine by squeezing without moving your legs. If you stop the urine flow, then you have used your pelvic floor muscles. These are the muscles you need to strengthen to help control urinary incontinence.

Carol: Tell us about the routine.

Jenny: It's important to empty your bladder before beginning. Then contract your pelvic muscles, the way you do when you want to prevent urine from coming out and hold for a count of 10. Then completely relax those muscles for a count of 10. Do 10 of them when you are sitting, standing and reclining. Do a total of 30 contractions in a single exercise routine, three times a day. Believe me...it will surely help.

Carol: Can all women benefit from doing these exercises?

Jenny: Of course! Both childbirth and menopause can weaken pelvic floor muscles. So these exercises will strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. In the long run this will control incontinence...and may even prevent it.

Finally, I want to remind you that urinary incontinence can be successfully controlled and treated, but only if you overcome whatever embarrassment you are feeling and go to your doctor for advice.

Carol: Thank you, Jenny. You've given us some very helpful information.

Tammy: Do stay with us. We'll be right back. Ros will be coming to join us with some good news from God's word the Bible.

Carol: It's good to have you here Ros.

Ros: Thanks – I love coming to spend time with you. Hmmm – today's topic is not an easy one to talk about is it? It can be a bit embarrassing. But you know, as I get older I think I'm becoming more practical and maybe less embarrassed about many things. My skin is changing – and becoming – do I say it? – more wrinkled!

And I seem to get stiff easily – especially when I get up out of my chair. And then there's my hair – well until not too long ago, I was quite happy with my dark hair that had some sprinkles of grey, but now – well I like to brighten it up a bit with some touches of blonde!

Now, even though I'm getting older (that's a funny thing – we all do don't we) I find that there are many things that I can enjoy even more than when I was younger. There's more quiet in my house – I like that – even though sometimes it's too quiet when my husband goes away for a few weeks at a time. But even then I find things that I enjoy doing when he's away, like visiting special friends and not having to worry about what time I get home because I need to prepare a meal for him. And – oh – I like this one – I have more room at the basin when I want to clean my teeth. He's not there trying to clean his at the same time!

And then, while my bed can be lonely, it's rather nice to be able to read without disturbing anyone, and if I wake in the night and feel like doing some more reading – well – I do it!

And that makes me think of more things that are fun – if I want to stay up late and watch something interesting on tv, or get caught up in a book, I can. And if I want to stay in bed a bit longer the next morning – that's ok, no one is waiting for me to cook their breakfast! So growing older for me has benefits as well as some difficulties. One of the benefits I love the best is that I now have grandchildren and I'm able to spend time with them, have fun with them, and take care of them if their parents are busy, but I don't have to take full responsibility for them. I can love them, enjoy them and then let them go back to their parents.

But you know, as we grow older we do still have some responsibilities. It's very important for me to pass on to my children and grandchildren the faith that God has so graciously given me in him. I met Jesus when I was a young girl. I found out that God had sent his son Jesus to this world. I learned many things about him and how he took care of people. I loved the stories of how he took children on his knee and blessed them. He even growled at his disciples and told them *not* to shoo the children away because they were very important to him. And I loved the stories of how he healed people. He made the lame man get up and walk. I imagined him leaping about and shouting to everyone about what Jesus had done for him. And then there were the stories of all different women and how Jesus

took care of them and spoke up for them when they were being treated badly by people in power in their society.

And then one day I learned that some men had put Jesus on a wooden cross – they had actually put nails in his hands and feet to hold him there. As a young child I felt so hurt for him. And I was puzzled. I knew he was God's son and that he and his father God had created the whole world. So why... why couldn't he just come down off that cross and say to the soldiers and the people around him..."See I AM the son of God. I have the power to get down from here and prove who I am."

Many times I puzzled about this. But one day as I got older I realized why Jesus had stayed on that cross and died. It was because he loved me so much and he wanted to make a way for me to have a relationship with him. He took the punishment for the things I had done wrong so that God did not have to punish me. I knew about punishment and I knew when I deserved it. And one day I understood that even though I deserved God's punishment, Jesus had taken it away for me by his suffering. Wow – I was so amazed. I cried and I asked God to forgive me and I said thank you to him for doing this for ME!

And so now, as I get older, I want my children and my grandchildren to understand that too. But not only them, as I get older I look around me and notice people who are lonely, hurting and sad. And I want to comfort them too. And do you know that the best way I can think of to comfort them is to tell them that someone loves them more than anyone else – Jesus – and that he gave his own life for them. There are some special words from the Bible that I love to share with anyone whenever I can. They are Jesus' own words... In fact Jesus had just been telling his disciples – his special followers – what was going to happen to him – that he was going to die. And he spoke these words to comfort them. One of his friends, Thomas, had just asked him something like this. 'But if you're going to die, and then go away, how are we going to find you? How can we know the way?'

If you have a Bible or can get someone to read to you, you can find Jesus' answer to his friends in the book of John Chapter 14 verse 6. This is what he said to them: "*I am the way...the truth...and the life. No-one can come to the Father except through me.*" Do you want to hear those words again? "*I am the way...the truth...and the life. No-one can come to the Father except through me.*" And then he went on to tell them many things about how much he loved them, and that after he went away he would send his Spirit to comfort them.

So you see – as I grew up and found all these things that Jesus said to be true in my life, I wanted to tell others about him. And most of all, I want to tell my children and my grandchildren. And one day I might even be able to tell my great grandchildren! I think by then I will be a lot more stiff...a lot more wrinkly and maybe even...‘incontinent’!! But I will always know that Jesus loves me and wants me to love others and tell them about him. So here I am – telling you too!

I pray that God will help you to understand these special words, and pass them on to others. God bless you!

Tammy: We've enjoyed our time with you today. And thanks Ros for telling us your story... Let me remind you where you can find those special words of Jesus. They are in John Chapter 14 verse 6. And what were they?

‘Jesus said, “*I am the way...the truth...and the life. No-one can come to the Father except through me.*”

Carol: And remember, as you get older you don't have to think that you are of no use any more. Your family and friends need you to tell them *your* special story, and to comfort them and teach them all the things that you have learned through your life.

Tammy: If you would like to ask any questions or find out more about Jesus please write to us at:

Carol: Until next time...goodbye.

Tammy: Yes goodbye...and keep smiling.