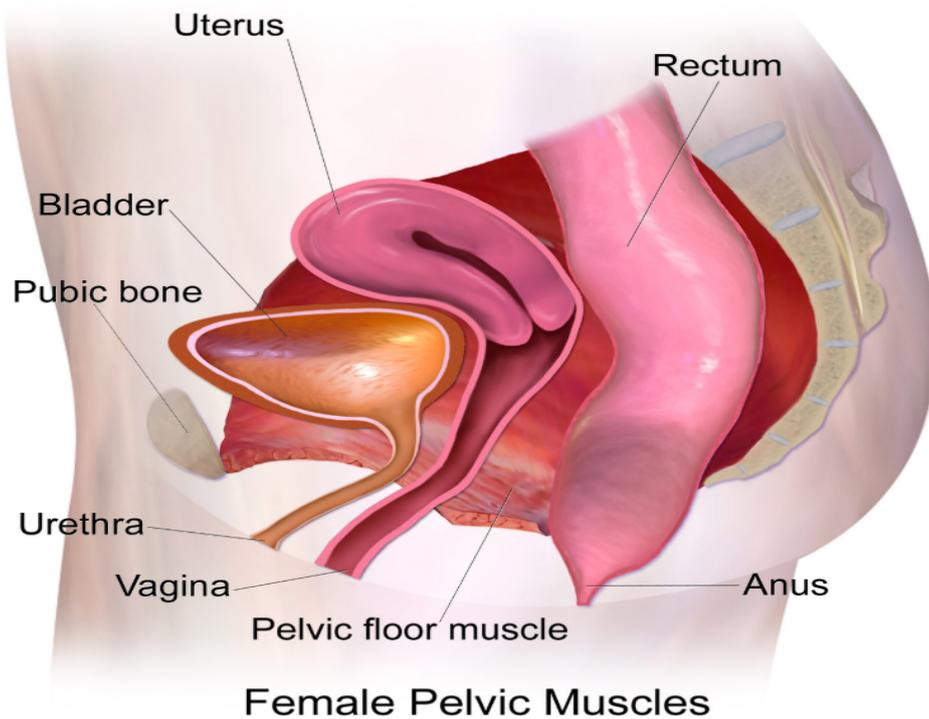


# Stress Incontinence in Women: Demystified



Stress incontinence affects millions of women, globally, causing involuntary urine leakage during activities like coughing, sneezing, laughing or straining while exercising. This common condition arises from weakened pelvic floor muscles or urethral sphincter, impacting quality of life but offering effective remedies.

It is the most prevalent urinary issue in women, rising with age, childbirth and post-menopause. It impacts 25-45% of women overall, with higher rates in multiparous females and athletes due to repeated abdominal pressure. Prevalence increases pre-menstrually and post-50 due to hormonal shifts.

The pubococcygeus muscle is a key component of the pelvic floor, crucial for continence and pelvic organ support in females. This broad, fan-shaped muscle forms a sling around the urethra, vagina, and rectum, maintaining closure during pressure events like coughing etc. It has openings for the vulva (urethra and vagina) centrally and rectum posteriorly, preventing prolapse or leakage. Weakness here directly causes stress urinary incontinence, from childbirth trauma or atrophy of muscle.

**Causes:** Pregnancy and vaginal childbirth stretch pelvic floor muscles supporting the urethra and bladder, leading to leakage. Menopause reduces estrogen levels, further weakening these tissues and worsening symptoms. Other contributory factors include obesity, chronic cough, constipation, heavy lifting and multiple childbirths/ pelvic surgeries.

**Remedies:** Lifestyle changes - ensure healthy weight to ease bladder pressure, quit smoking (if smoker) to reduce cough, and avoid bladder irritants like caffeine, alcohol, spicy foods, and citrus. Absorbent pads provide immediate relief while treatments work; vaginal pessaries or oestrogen creams offer non-invasive support. For severe cases, medications like duloxetine or surgeries (sling procedures) restore support.

**Pelvic Floor Exercises:** Kegel exercises are first-line, strengthening pelvic muscles effectively in women under 60. To perform: Tighten muscles as if stopping urine flow (without straining), hold 5-10 seconds, relax 10 seconds; do 10-15 reps, 3 sets daily for 6 weeks minimum.