



# HEALTH AWARENESS

## Incontinence Should No Longer Be A Hidden Health Problem

(NAPSA)—A new report in the *American Journal of Nursing* addresses a common problem that can make it difficult to get the most enjoyment out of life, or even to plan your day.

Urinary incontinence is one of the most prevalent and costly U.S. public health problems. Hospitals, nursing homes and similar institutions alone spend more than \$5.2 billion per year to help patients deal with this problem. Worse, studies show the condition is significantly underdiagnosed, so many sufferers aren't receiving the treatment that they need.

More than 20 million Americans suffer from one type of urinary incontinence known as overactive bladder or OAB. This condition is identified by any or all of the following symptoms: the sudden, strong desire to void, more than 8 bathroom visits in 24 hours and waking during the night to use the bathroom. Urge incontinence, or the involuntary leakage of urine after a sudden urge, may or may not be present. OAB can be confused with stress incontinence, which is leaking during physical activity such as coughing, sneezing and lifting. Nurses can be a good resource for patients to help classify their symptoms. Accurate identification is important because different treatments are indicated for each of these conditions.

While many older Americans suffer from urinary incontinence, the condition is not a natural part of aging, as many people assume. Younger people, men as well as women may be affected. Unfortunately, 60 percent of sufferers do

### UI Facts:

Between 20 and 25 million Americans suffer from UI.

UI strikes people of all ages and both sexes.

Sixty percent of people with UI have never discussed the problem with medical personnel.

Four out of five cases of UI can be treated.



not seek treatment from a health-care professional.

One reason patients are so reluctant to discuss urinary incontinence is the perception that it's not an important problem compared to other health issues. In fact, it can be a serious threat to your quality of life, nurses explain. Not only does that take away much of the joy of living, it can be exacerbated or even cause other, more serious health problems.

Another cause for hesitation is a belief that nothing can be done. According to incontinence researchers, however, approximately 80 percent of cases of UI can be cured or improved. The solution could be as simple as eliminating bladder irritants (such as coffee) from the diet or substituting medications that affect the bladder with ones that do not. More frequently, treatment involves a combination of behavioral modification, pelvic muscles re-education, medication collection devices, and absorbent products.

To learn more about UI research, go to [www.nursingcenter.com/ui](http://www.nursingcenter.com/ui) at the AJN Web site. For more information on UI or to have yourself tested, see a nurse or other health-care provider.