

Urinary Incontinence in Women Who Have Never Been Pregnant

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The full report is titled “Urinary Incontinence in Young Nulligravid Women. A Cross-sectional Analysis.” It is in the 17 July 2012 issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine* (volume 157, pages 87-93). The authors are T. O’Halloran, R.J. Bell, P.J. Robinson, and S.R. Davis.

What is the problem and what is known about it so far?

Having been pregnant increases a woman’s risk for leaking urine (urinary incontinence [UI]), which may manifest as leakage after certain activities (for example, running or sneezing) or an inability to hold one’s urine with a full bladder. How often UI occurs among young women who have never been pregnant is not known.

Why did the researchers do this particular study?

To begin to assess how often young women who have never been pregnant experience UI and whether certain factors are associated with UI.

Who was studied?

1620 women in medical clinics and on university campuses.

How was the study done?

Surveys were given to women asking whether they had ever had UI. The questionnaire also included questions to assess the possible effects of UI on quality of life. Posters were placed in medical clinics informing women about the availability of the questionnaire, and women were handed the questionnaire on university campuses. The researchers analyzed the answers on the questionnaires that were returned.

What did the researchers find?

Almost two thirds of the questionnaires were returned, and 1002 had completed enough information to be assessed. Overall, almost 13% of these women reported experiencing UI. An assessment of responses from women who said they were students found that those who had ever been sexually active and did not use contraceptive pills that contained estrogen more often reported UI. Women who reported UI scored worse on quality-of-life assessments than women who did not report UI.

What were the limitations of the study?

The researchers could not sample women in a more systematic manner, so they do not know how representative the study results are of young women in general. This study design cannot evaluate whether sexual activity causes UI, the use of contraceptive pills protects against UI, or whether these are each merely related to some other factor that causes UI.

What are the implications of the study?

Urinary incontinence may be a common problem among young women who have never been pregnant. More studies are needed to better assess this problem.

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