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Gender, Age and Medical History Linked to Overactive Bladder

Postmenopausal women who gave birth multiple times and live with obesity are hardest hit by overactive bladder symptoms.

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Many older adults experience overactive bladder (OAB) syndrome, which can result in urinary incontinence. However, OAB and urinary incontinence are more likely to affect specific groups of postmenopausal women, according to findings from a study published online in the journal Menopause. The findings were announced via a press release from The North American Menopause Society.

In general, there are two types of urinary incontinence: urinary urge incontinence (UUI) and stress urinary incontinence (SUI); both involve the involuntary passing of urine. UUI is linked with the urge to urinate, while SUI is triggered by effort or exertion, such as that associated with sneezing, exercising and coughing.

Characterized by urinary urgency, OAB is usually accompanied by an increase in daytime and nighttime visits to the bathroom and the involuntary release of urine. In addition, urinary incontinence is more common in women, and symptoms worsen with aging. The issue occurs in just 17.1% of women ages 20 or older, compared with 38% of women ages 60 and older.

For the investigation, researchers collected data about the prevalence of and factors linked with urinary symptoms from 12,198 female nurses in the Japan Nurses' Health Study. Researchers estimated the odds for overactive bladder, stress urinary incontinence and mixed symptoms of urinary incontinence, including the involuntary leakage of urine linked with urgency and exertion.

Investigators also considered women's smoking status and history of diabetes, hysterectomy and hormone therapy use.

Researchers found that OAB was significantly associated with women ages 45 to 54. Additionally, obesity and multiple births heightened the risk for stress urinary incontinence. Interestingly, scientists also learned that women might experience less frequent SUI symptoms after menopause.

"This study underscores how common urinary incontinence is in women, with nearly one in five

Japanese women reporting urinary incontinence related to OAB or SUI in the last month. Midlife women were particularly affected by SUI (18.2% in women ages 50 to 54 years),” observed Stephanie S. Faubion, MD, the medical director of The North American Menopause Society.

“Given the significant negative effect on quality of life and the presence of effective strategies for management of these burdensome symptoms, clinicians should routinely ask women about urinary incontinence,” she concluded.

To learn more about the effects of menopause on women’s health, read “Exercise May Help Women Retain Muscle Mass During Menopause.”

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