Recovery of Urinary Control After Radical Prostatectomy  
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Urinary incontinence (leakage) is a risk of surgery for prostate cancer. Although the overwhelming majority of men eventually regain complete urinary control, the recovery process can be frustrating. This sheet is intended to provide information helpful to you during your recovery.

**Why may incontinence occur?**

In normal circumstances, control of urination is both an active and passive process. There is a muscle called the external sphincter which can be voluntarily controlled to stop the urine in midstream. Generally, this muscle is well preserved after a radical prostatectomy. In addition, there is an internal urinary sphincter mechanism which involves muscles which may partially extend onto the prostate. These muscles must be separated from the prostate and preserved during surgery to help avoid incontinence.

Urinary control can be viewed in a simple manner. The pressure within the bladder must be less than the resistance provided by the sphincter or urine leakage may occur. The usual problem after radical prostatectomy is that the sphincter resistance is diminished. Circumstances which increase bladder pressure such as coughing, laughing, or contraction of the abdominal muscles can cause the bladder pressure to rise higher than the sphincter resistance. That is why men with leakage after a radical prostatectomy usually notice this when they are active or with cough, sneeze, etc. The leakage which typically occurs after a radical prostatectomy is termed at times a stress incontinence, because it usually occurs when additional stress is placed on the bladder.

**How quickly will urinary control return?**

Almost half of men regain control very quickly, sometimes as soon as the catheter is removed, after surgery. In others though, it may be a more gradual process. It is difficult for the surgeon to predict how quickly control will return.

Improvement in urinary control can continue for up to a year after surgery, although most men are completely dry before that time. Almost 10% of men are left with a very small amount of leakage which occasionally soils the underwear or requires a very small pad. In around 2% of men, good urinary control does not return and multiple protective pads are required.
Will I have any trouble urinating after the catheter is removed?

Most men have a very strong urinary stream after a radical prostatectomy, usually much better than before surgery. Any symptoms of frequent urination or having to get up often at night, which existed before surgery, usually, but not always, improves after a radical prostatectomy. A small percentage of men develop some scarring at the opening of the bladder, which causes the urinary stream to be quite slow. If you are having problems with this, mention it to your doctor as it usually can be taken care of quite easily.

What can I do to speed up the process?

Undoubtedly, time is the most important factor in recovery of urinary control. Unless the doctor suspects there is a problem with the bladder itself, medications are not usually very helpful. Kegal exercises are commonly recommended and may be helpful. These are performed by tightening and relaxing the buttocks and the urethral sphincter muscle and holding it for a few seconds. They are usually repeated in sets of 10 and should be performed several times a day.

While they are not harmful to either the bladder or the urethral sphincter, and do not have to be avoided, alcohol or caffeinated beverages can make leakage temporarily worse.

What if my incontinence never gets better?

As mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of men regain complete urinary control and it is unusual for a man to be left with significant problems. However, difficulty with incontinence does occur rarely. When this does happen, implantation of an artificial sphincter or a procedure known as a “Sling Operation” can usually take care of the problem.

Important things you should remember:

- You are very likely to regain complete urinary control.
- How quickly urinary control returns varies from person to person.
- Time is the most important factor in recovery of urinary control.
- Although improvement can be ongoing for up to a year, most men are dry well before that time.
- Kegal exercises are commonly recommended and may be helpful in some men.
- As always, do not be hesitant to talk with your doctor about any problems you are having.