

Involuntary urinary incontinence can discourage sufferers from exercise

27 February 2017

According to a study published in the distinguished journal *PLOS ONE*, urinary incontinence symptoms in middle-aged women are linked to lower levels of exercise. Involuntary urinary incontinence symptoms can discourage sufferers from partaking in exercise. However, exercise can ease symptoms by, for example, reducing obesity – as obesity increases pressure on the urethra – and strengthening pelvic floor muscles.

Urinary incontinence is a fairly common symptom in women, affecting approximately half of all women at some point. However, talking about the topic can be seen as embarrassing. Regular, problematic [urinary incontinence](#) increases with age, and in particular after menopause. According to the results of this recently published study, urinary incontinence symptoms are more common in women who lead a more sedentary lifestyle and whose weekly physical activity is below the recommended 2.5 hours of [endurance exercise](#).

"The study does not answer the question of whether exercise is being avoided because of the urinary incontinence or whether more abundant exercise helped to keep symptoms in check," says Assistant Professor Eija Laakkonen from the University of Jyväskylä's Gerontology Research Center.

"However, the study does demonstrate that urinary incontinence symptoms are linked to [physical activity](#) levels in middle-aged women. A connection between reproductive health factors and objectively measured exercise had not been studied at all prior to this."

A total of 647 women aged 48–55 years old and living in central Finland partook in the study, which looked into the reproductive health of middle-aged [women](#). Just over half of the participants had experienced [pelvic floor](#) related symptoms, the most common of which was exertion-related urinary incontinence, which 39 per cent of the

study participants had experienced.

Exercise to ease symptoms

"Health care professionals should be asking openly whether urinary incontinence is a barrier to exercise," urges Urogynaecologist Pauliina Aukee, an obstetrics and gynaecology specialist who was a member of the research team.

"If a patient is suffering from urinary incontinence symptoms, the forms of exercise they undertake should include exercises that support core and pelvic floor management without intense bouncing movements. This should also be taken into account in exercise guidance."

"Managing symptoms and taking them into account can help people find a form of exercise that suits them, and that does not place too much of a burden on the pelvic floor. This will allow people to continue [exercise](#) in an enjoyable way even after going through menopause."

More information: Eija K. Laakkonen et al. Female reproductive factors are associated with objectively measured physical activity in middle-aged women, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0172054](#)

Provided by University of Jyväskylä

APA citation: Involuntary urinary incontinence can discourage sufferers from exercise (2017, February 27) retrieved 28 November 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-02-involuntary-urinary-incontinence-discourage.html>

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