

Why do I pee when I sneeze?

Have you been told that leaking small amounts of urine with things like sneezing, coughing, or jumping is a normal effect of aging or following childbirth? We're here to tell you that it's not! Peeing when you sneeze is a form of **incontinence!** **It may be common but it's not normal, and you don't have to live with it.**

Types of Urinary incontinence

There are a few types of urinary incontinence, but peeing when you sneeze is a form known as **stress urinary incontinence (SUI)**. SUI happens because of decreased strength of the pelvic floor muscles. When you cough, sneeze, jump, or workout, the pressure in your abdomen rises, pushing down on your pelvic floor. If those muscles are weak or not turning on the way they should, your body can't stop the flow of urine.

You may also be experiencing...

- Constipation (or a history of holding your bowel/bladder)
- Low back pain
- Bladder irritation
- Dietary changes

These are all corresponding symptoms and/or causes of pelvic floor dysfunction or weakness.

What Controls my Pelvic Floor?

There are 4 primary muscles that control intrabdominal pressure, core strength, and therefore affect pelvic floor strength and urinary retention:

- **Diaphragm:** it all starts with breathing! Your diaphragm helps control the pressure in your abdomen at rest and during activity. If not functioning correctly, it can contribute to pelvic floor dysfunction.
- **Transverse abdominus:** this deep abdominal muscle is responsible for the stabilization of your inner core, it supports your lower back and offers stability for your internal organs.
- **Multifidus:** this muscle lays under the big muscles along the sides of your spine. It helps stabilize individual spinal segments during activities and support your inner core.
- **Pelvic floor muscles:** these are the muscles that actually support the urethra, rectum, and reproductive organs. If these muscles are weak, inhibited, or have experienced trauma, they can cause SUI.



But why is this happening to me?

Is this just post-partum weakness? Maybe. Giving birth doesn't inherently make your pelvic floor weak but it may cause it to be "inhibited," leaving your body unable to figure out how to use your pelvic floor muscles while you move. No matter how much you work out or how many kegels you do, you cannot make the pelvic floor stronger until you turn it on.

Isn't this just a side effect of aging? Maybe, but you don't have to accept it! As we age, our muscles get weaker but this process happens very slowly. What tends to speed it up is when we decide that, because we're getting weaker, we should do less. This is not how you protect yourself from the effects of aging! With some targeted training, you can learn to keep moving while avoiding the symptoms of incontinence.

But I've never had a baby, I'm young, this isn't supposed to happen to me! There are a lot of possible causes for a weak or inhibited pelvic floor. Things like emotional trauma, stress, low back pain, troublesome menstruation, abdominal surgeries, and even poor form during exercise can affect your pelvic floor, leading to SUI. Good news is that all of these things are manageable with the right tools.

So then what can I do about it?

The first step is seeking help and becoming empowered in knowing that peeing when you sneeze is not normal, and you don't just have to live with it! In fact, the solution that will work for YOU is probably much simpler than you'd expect. It could be a change in breathing habits, a little bit of strengthening, or something else quite simple. A qualified physical therapist can help you figure it out!

Special thanks to our contributing writer, **Dr. Jocelyn Wallace, PT, DPT, CSCS**. Jocelyn started at B2N in May 2017 and her passion lies in helping people continue to do what they love in exercise, recreation and life!

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