

# Multiple Sclerosis & Incontinence

- *The Nervous System and Its Role in the Urinary Process*
- *Specific Causes of Incontinence*
- *Diagnosing the Dysfunction*
- *Treatment Options*

Multiple Sclerosis is a disease of the nervous system that impairs muscle coordination and strength. Because the urinary process requires coordination of voluntary and involuntary muscles, most individuals with Multiple Sclerosis experience some level of incontinence. Before treatment can be recommended, the type of dysfunction must be determined by your physician.



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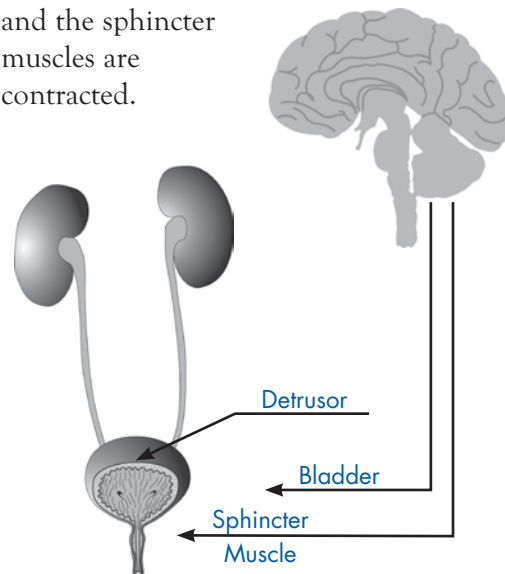
InfoPro™ is a FREE educational program designed by HDIS to help health professionals and patients understand bladder control loss. Here is a list of the various brochures that we offer:

- *HDIS and You, Managing Incontinence with Dignity*
- *A Layman's Guide to Incontinence*
- *Prostate Disorders & Incontinence*
- *Pelvic Muscle Exercise (PME)*
- *Management Techniques for Incontinence*
- *Resources for Caregivers*

## The Nervous System and Its Role in the Urinary Process

As previously stated, proper urinary function is dependent upon coordination of several muscle functions. The muscles must receive messages from the brain alerting them to perform their function.

When the bladder is storing urine, the detrusor muscle is relaxed and the sphincter muscles are contracted.



As the bladder fills with urine, nerves inside the bladder alert the pons area of the brain of the coming need to urinate.

Once the bladder is full, the brain sends a message to the detrusor to contract and push out the urine, and to the sphincter muscles to relax so the urine may be released. If the messages are not sent to and from the brain, or are not properly coordinated, incontinence will occur.

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## Specific Causes of Incontinence

A visit to your physician's office is the first step in determining the cause of your incontinence. A urine culture can be taken to see if a bladder infection, called cystitis, is the cause of your condition. If this is the cause, antibiotics can be used to clear the infection. Recurrent infections may require other methods of treatment.

In most cases the incontinence is caused by one of the following dysfunctions in the nervous system.

### Storage Dysfunction

Nerves in the bladder send a message to the brain that it is time to urinate even if there is only a small amount of urine being stored. The result may be an emptying of the bladder before you can reach the toilet.

### Emptying Dysfunction

In this case, the bladder is not completely emptied during urination. The excess urine builds in the bladder to the point where it can no longer be contained and then it overflows.

### Combined Dysfunction

In some cases, you may experience complications caused by both storage and emptying dysfunction. You may experience the urge to urinate when the bladder is not completely full, and then not be able to completely empty the bladder because the sphincter muscle did not relax.

## Diagnosing the Dysfunction

Several techniques may be used to determine which dysfunction is at the root of your problems. Your physician can insert a catheter (a thin tube) into the bladder after urination is completed. This will help him determine if the bladder was completely emptied. The procedure may seem intimidating, but it can be performed quickly and with little pain right in your doctor's office.

The same results can be achieved by having an x-ray of the bladder taken after you have urinated. The picture will show any excess urine contained in the bladder immediately following urination.

### ***For more information on Multiple Sclerosis you can contact:***

National Multiple Sclerosis Society  
733 Third Ave.  
3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10017

#### Call:

1-800-FIGHTMS  
(1-800-344-4867)

#### Or visit their website at:

[www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org)

## Treatment Options

Once the type of dysfunction is determined, a proper course of treatment can be administered based on the type of dysfunction.

### Storage Dysfunction

Your doctor can prescribe medications that will relax the bladder. A normal amount of urine can then accumulate before the brain receives the signal of the need to urinate.

### Emptying Dysfunction

The treatment for this type of dysfunction is self-catheterization. Just like the diagnostic test, a catheter is inserted several times a day into the urethral opening to reach the bladder. The urine can then be released.

This procedure is safe and simple, and easy to learn. You may feel awkward the first few times you try performing the technique on yourself, but in no time you will perform it with ease and be relieved of the bothersome symptoms.

### Combined Dysfunction

A combination of medication to relax the bladder and self-catheterization will be recommended for those individuals with combined dysfunction.

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