

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCING WOMEN'S WATERWORKS

There's a one in three chance that any woman reading this book has a secret: incontinence - the problem of being unable to always control her waterworks. Chances are, too, that if she has been brave enough to confide this secret (maybe to her mother or best friend), she was sympathetically consoled and told: "That's OK, I leak too. It's part of the price women pay for being mothers."

This reasoning is used so often that it has been accepted as fact... but take heart, there is no truth behind it at all. Leakage may be common, but it's never normal. And, more importantly, incontinence is curable.

Leakage is so common that it's not unusual for every member of a women's senior basketball team or social tennis group to wear protective pads during games. Some women limit their golf games to nine holes or visit the "ladies" whenever the clubhouse comes into view. Others take up swimming for exercise and avoid aerobic classes, jogging or power walking just to keep the secret of their leakage safe.

The onset of this embarrassing problem is often very gradual, but never unnoticed. It's your body's way of telling you that things are not quite as they should be. Take it from me, leaking urine is neither normal or acceptable and your little secret is really just the beginning of what can become a downward spiral where loss of bladder control goes hand-in-hand with loss of self respect as well as anxiety and depression ...extra burdens you can certainly do without.

Thirty-six per cent of women over the age of 45 years suffer incontinence and the real shame is not that they actually have this problem, but that it can be prevented. The easiest time to regain control of your waterworks is when leakage begins. This initial leaking, called "stress incontinence", is caused by a weakening of the muscles that keep urine stored in the bladder. These muscles, known as the pelvic floor muscles, fail to fight the forces which push down from the abdomen when you laugh, sneeze, run, jump or perform any other type of physical exertion.

#### *Sound familiar?*

If unchecked, simple stress incontinence can progress to include symptoms such as urgency and frequency in the following way: You're running to reach the bank before closing time and suddenly you feel dampness spreading between your legs. You divert to the nearest toilet to check that there are no tell-tale wet patches on your clothes. You don't really feel the need to, but you go to the toilet just to make sure the leak doesn't happen again. Anxiety sets in and, whenever you think there is the slightest possibility of a re-run, you take yourself off to the toilet to empty your bladder, establishing a pattern of frequency.

Soon you are a confirmed toilet hopper: you know every 'ladies' in town and which gas stations along your usual driving routes have conveniences. You cut down on fluid intake.

You start joking about your “dodgy bladder” and friends all laugh in a supporting sympathetic way. They either share your problem or know someone who does, so acceptance of the situation leads to the belief that it’s OK. *This is just not so!*

The purpose of this book is to help you regain control of your waterworks so there are no leakages and no frequent dashes to the toilet. Your bladder will no longer be a bossy dictator telling you that you need to urinate every half hour. To take charge again, you need to understand how the waterworks function and why the system breaks down,

When women’s waterworks break down they usually complain of three main symptoms:  
*Stress Incontinence* - the leaks which happen when they cough, sneeze, swing at a golf ball or lunge at tennis.

*Urgency* - the really strong need to pass urine which, if ignored, most women feel would cause them to wet their pants.

*Frequency* - a self-explanatory term which applies to the need to empty the bladder often, with only a short time between visits to the toilet. If this frequency occurs during the night it is referred to as nocturia. A combination of any or all of these symptoms can be present.

### **Do You Have A Problem?**

Most women consider their toilet habits “normal”. But are they?

Do you go to the toilet four to six times each day only?

Do you sleep through or get up only once through the night?

Do you have dry pants at all times?

Do you pass 300-400 mls each time? - one coffee mug holds 250 mls.

Do you pass water easily, without straining or stopping and starting?

Do you find urinating is painless and quite a comfortable thing to do?

If you answer “yes” to all these questions, you have no problem, your urinary pattern is normal.

If you have answered “no” to any of these questions then something in your waterworks is not quite right and you should take steps right now to help overcome these problems before they become worse. Otherwise the chance of being an elderly incontinent woman is a real one. Remember, 60 per cent of all people in nursing homes are there not because they have decreased mental faculties or because they have lost the ability to move around, but because they are incontinent.