



 NorthShore<sup>®</sup>

# TALKING ABOUT INCONTINENCE

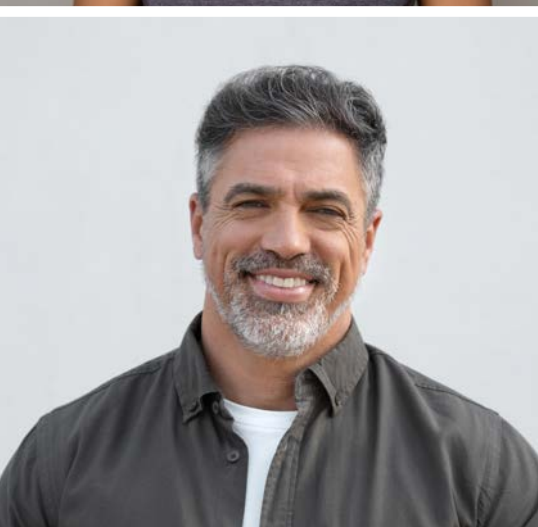
Practical Tips for Starting the Conversation



**YOU**



**ARE**



**NOT**



**ALONE**



# Breaking the Silence

Whether you're new to incontinence or have been living with it for some time, talking about it rarely comes naturally. Cultural norms teach us from toddlerhood that “bathroom matters” are private. By adulthood, the rules of what's acceptable are so ingrained that they feel instinctive. The message is clear: these things aren't meant to be discussed.

But what happens when using the bathroom isn't simple anymore? When you need help but have no tools to talk about it?

Incontinence can feel isolating — but you are not alone. It's incredibly common, often treatable, and, regardless, very manageable. In fact, incontinence affects more people than diabetes and heart disease combined<sup>1</sup>, with nearly 80 million women<sup>2</sup> and 3.3 million men<sup>3</sup> in the U.S. living with it today.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The average woman waits over 6 years before talking to a doctor about incontinence symptoms. That's too long to suffer in silence, especially when early treatment often leads to better results and easier symptom management.

Sharing your experience with navigating incontinence, whether personally or as a caregiver, is a powerful step. Not only does it improve your mental and physical well-being, but it also strengthens relationships, helps reduce stigma, and opens the door to proper care — including finding the right adult diapers and incontinence care products that help you feel secure and in control.

### *In the following pages, we'll help you learn how to:*

- Talk to anyone about your incontinence — including your doctor, your loved ones, and even those strangers in line ahead of you at the public restroom.
- Navigate the practical and emotional aspects of an incontinence conversation.
- Highlight strategies for making those first conversations about incontinence easier, both from a first-hand perspective and as a caregiver.

While finding the courage to start the conversation may never be easy, we hope this eBook helps ease the uncertainty and reduce the anxiety around how to begin.

1. (2025). We Count Campaign. National Association for Continence. <https://nafc.org/we-count>

2. (2025). We Count: A New Campaign to Help Women with Incontinence. NAFC Health Blog. <https://nafc.org/health-blog/we-count-a-new-campaign-to-help-women-with-incontinence>

3. (2023). Male incontinence: Overview and slideshow. <https://www.webmd.com/urinary-incontinence-oab/ss/slideshow-male-incontinence>

# Getting Emotionally Ready to Share

Unlike many health issues, incontinence remains shrouded in silence. But that silence isn't protective, it's isolating. It prevents people from getting the empathy, support, and solutions they deserve. Here's the reality:

**1 in 3 people have experienced incontinence recently**

**2 in 3 people will experience it at some point in their lives**

**3 in 3 people know someone who is currently managing it**

Understanding how many people quietly manage incontinence every day can ease the emotional weight of opening up. Because the first step toward having a conversation isn't about finding the perfect words: it's realizing you are not alone.

We walk for cancer. We wear pink for breast health. Men grow mustaches for men's health. We host fundraisers for dementia. But when it comes to leaks? We whisper.

Why?

Because the stigma surrounding incontinence is still loud — and it tells us this is something we're supposed to hide. But, the more we speak openly, the more we can dismantle silence for ourselves and for others.

“

*Shame dies when stories  
are told in safe places.*

Ann Voskamp

”



Before bringing someone else into your experience, take a moment to check in with yourself:

- How do I feel about my incontinence?
- What's stopping me from opening up?
- What's the worst thing that could happen, and is that fear based in truth?
- What do I want someone else to understand?

### False Assumptions

- ✗ People with incontinence aren't as good as other people.
- ✗ Incontinence is only a problem for babies and the elderly.
- ✗ They must be lazy, unhygienic, or somehow to blame for their condition.

### The Truth

- ✓ Incontinence is an involuntary medical condition, the same as diabetes or asthma.
- ✓ It can happen to anyone, regardless of age.
- ✓ Needing adult diapers doesn't make anyone less of a person.

When you learn to replace outdated assumptions with medical reality, your confidence increases, as does your sense of peace. The more you accept your experience, the more likely others will, too.

# Talking to Family and Friends (or Anyone!)

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE AND CONVERSATION TIPS

Breaking down the big question of who to tell into smaller, simpler ones can help reduce decision fatigue and make the right choice feel more manageable.

Start by identifying why you want to tell this person. Is it for practical reasons, like needing more flexibility while traveling, or for emotional support, like having someone to talk to?

Then, weigh the pros and cons. Will talking about it relieve the stress of keeping it hidden, or are you worried they might react poorly? Thinking through how the conversation might impact the relationship can help you decide whether or not to open up.

Next comes the logistics. Use the chart below as a “choose your own adventure” to plan how the conversation might go. Breaking it into parts (**Who**, **When/Where**, **How to Start**, and **Why**) can make the process feel less overwhelming and more doable.



Who	When/Where	How to Start	Why
Romantic partner	At home, during a quiet moment (e.g., after dinner or on a weekend morning).	"I need to tell you something that's hard for me to talk about, so please let me finish speaking before you ask any follow-up questions."	I hate keeping anything from them.
Coworker	During a morning coffee break or afternoon casual check-in.	"Can I tell you something in confidence?"	I want someone I can trust to cover for me and keep my secret at work.
Friend	At dinner or during a relaxed hangout (e.g., at home or the park).	"I want to tell you why I've been so MIA lately."	I want to feel less alone and take care of my friendship.
Boss	In a scheduled one-on-one meeting.	"I have something personal to discuss that I need your help with."	I need special accommodations during the workday.
Child	Over the phone or in person, in a quiet private setting.	"Do you have a minute? I want to talk to you about something that's difficult for me."	I need more help in my day-to-day life.
Stranger	While waiting in line for a public restroom.	"I'm so sorry to do this, but can I cut in front of you?"	I have a medical condition, and I need to get to the bathroom immediately.

When it comes to who, when, and where, aim for a setting where you both feel relaxed and unhurried — somewhere that allows for openness without pressure. (Of course, talking to a stranger in a public restroom is a special case... but sometimes you just do what you have to do!)

As for how to start, having a lead-in ready can help set the tone and ease your nerves. Use one of the examples above or create something in your own voice. Simply having a plan makes a difference.

And finally, be clear about why you're sharing. Whether it's for emotional support or practical help, no one can read your mind. Being direct about your needs increases the chances of getting the understanding or assistance you're hoping for. Closed mouths don't get fed, after all.

# Talking to a Medical Professional

## HOW TO COME PREPARED

Discussing any new symptoms or noticeable changes in your health is incredibly important. If something doesn't feel right in your body, say so. Talking to a doctor can mean the difference between getting the help you need and suffering in silence. Incontinence, in particular, is often treatable — but many people miss that chance because they're too embarrassed to speak up.

Changes in bowel or urinary health could also signal that something more serious is going on. It's always wise to rule out underlying issues with a medical provider who knows your history.

You are your own greatest advocate. That means not only speaking up, but also asking questions, expressing concerns, and seeking a second opinion if necessary. Never let fear or embarrassment stop you from getting the care you deserve.





*Once you have an appointment on the calendar, here are a few steps to help you get the most out of your visit:*

1

## Write Down Everything Ahead of Time

Include any questions you have (no matter how big, small, or seemingly embarrassing!) as well as your top concerns and a clear description of your symptoms. A “silly” fear that turns out to be nothing is always better than an unanswered one lingering in your mind. Keep a running list in the days or weeks before your appointment and bring it with you.

2

## Bring a List of All Current Medications and Pertinent Medical History

This is especially important with a new doctor. Include prescriptions, supplements, and over-the-counter medications you take regularly. If possible, keep a bladder or bowel diary for two days leading up to the visit to give helpful context about your symptoms.



[Click here](#) or scan the QR Code to download a free NorthShore Bladder and Bowel Diary.

3

## Do Your Research

Understanding as much as you can about incontinence before you speak with a medical professional will help you become an active decision-maker during the appointment. Aim to familiarize yourself with the most common terms, definitions, causes, and types of incontinence.

If you're not sure where to start, NorthShore's **free Incontinence 101 eBook** offers a helpful breakdown of symptoms, statistics, and a wide variety of products that can support symptom management. And of course, if there's anything you don't understand during your appointment — don't hesitate to ask. It's your doctor's job to explain things clearly, but it's your job to make sure you walk away with the answers you need.



[Click here](#) or scan the QR Code to download a free NorthShore Incontinence 101 eBook.

# Talking to a Medical Professional

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS AND TIPS

If you're unsure of where to begin, the list of questions and discussion items below can serve as a helpful starting point and checklist of things to remember for your upcoming appointment:

### GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- How much water or other fluids should I drink each day?
- Are there certain foods or drinks that could make my incontinence worse?
- What lifestyle changes (e.g., diet, fluid intake, physical activity) might help manage my symptoms?
- Are there activities I should avoid? Are there any exercises—like Kegels—that may be beneficial?
- Is bladder training a good option for me?
- Are there medications that could help? What are their potential side effects?
- Do you know what's causing my incontinence? Are there tests you can run to help determine the cause?
- Is my incontinence likely to be temporary or chronic?
- Could I be a candidate for surgery or another procedure? What are the risks and benefits?
- What are the pros and cons of the treatment plan you recommend?
- Do you suggest any specific products or skincare routines to help protect sensitive areas?



### **DETAILS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR BLADDER/BOWEL DIARY:**

- A time log of all toileting activity (for at least a two-day period).
- A detailed record of everything you eat and drink during that time.
- The number of nighttime bathroom trips.
- Any changes in urine flow strength throughout the day.
- Notes on bowel movements — are they easy, strained, or affected by constipation?
- Any leakage incidents and the context in which they occurred.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOUR DOCTOR:**

- When your symptoms began and how they've changed over time.
- How often leakage occurs and how much urine is typically lost.
- Any patterns or routines that seem to improve or worsen your symptoms.
- Specific activities (like coughing, sneezing, or exercising) that trigger leakage.
- Any homeopathic remedies, supplements, or treatments you've tried so far.

# Talking to Loved Ones About Their Incontinence

If you're a caregiver noticing incontinence symptoms in a loved one for the first time, or if occasional accidents are becoming more frequent, it's time to talk about it. While it may be a difficult conversation, open dialogue about all aspects of their health is essential to building a respectful and comfortable care relationship.

Many people assume incontinence is part of aging and simply accept it as a daily inconvenience. But changes in bowel or bladder health should never be ignored. Addressing the topic early can help prevent the condition from worsening or lingering longer than necessary.



*Even if the conversation feels awkward, there are ways to make it easier for both of you:*

## 1 Pick the Right Time and Place

Find a time when there's no one else around, and start by asking, "Is now a good time to talk about something hard?" Giving them the option to say, "no," while setting expectations that this conversation might be uncomfortable helps to prevent feelings of being ambushed.

## 2 Let them Share Their Experience

Instead of leading with your observations, ask open questions, such as:

*"Do you ever struggle to make it to the toilet in time?"*

*"Do you ever experience accidental leaks that require a change of clothing?"*

*"How is that affecting you?"*

This allows them to feel heard rather than judged.

## 3 Establish a Plan of Action

Discuss ways to manage your loved one's symptoms that will make you both more comfortable. Include a plan to talk with a medical professional and what absorbency products might be helpful.

## 4 Remind them They're Not Alone

This is perhaps the most important part of the conversation. You already know that their health and well-being is your biggest priority, but sometimes it's nice to remind them, too. Be sure to reiterate that all incontinence symptoms are very manageable and often treatable. They have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, and most importantly, they can trust you. You are here to help.

Stigmas and embarrassment can make incontinence feel more overwhelming than it needs to be — for both the person experiencing it and the caregiver. It's normal to feel uncomfortable witnessing a loved one in a vulnerable state. That's why it's so important to approach every conversation with compassion and honesty. Acknowledge that it's hard and that you're both doing the best you can.

# Ending the Stigma, One Voice at a Time

For many people, talking about incontinence, whether it's your own experience or that of someone you care for, may never feel completely comfortable. It's personal. It's vulnerable. And it goes against all the quiet social rules we've absorbed over the years about what's "appropriate" to share.

But here's what's worth remembering: just because something feels uncomfortable doesn't mean it isn't worth doing.

By choosing to read this eBook, you've already taken a meaningful and courageous first step! Seeking knowledge, exploring your options, and preparing yourself to have these conversations — that alone shows strength. You're already doing the work of moving forward, and that's something to feel really good about.

Every time you choose honesty over silence, you make room for real support. Every time you trust someone with a part of your story, you create space for empathy and healing. That kind of openness not only lightens your emotional load, but it also chips away at the stigma that keeps so many others quiet.

Whether you confide in your doctor, your partner, or a few close friends and family members, being able to talk about what you're going through is one of the most important things you can do. Honest conversations can lighten the emotional load and lead to meaningful support, better care, and practical solutions.

*Take it from NorthShore customer M.B., who shared his experience with finding support:*

“

*None of us should have to feel like we're struggling alone. Sharing with [my friend] really changed everything. Not only was a load taken off my back, but she helped me find the right protection for dry nights.*

”

NorthShore is committed to being a steady source of support for those living with incontinence and the people who care for them. Our Customer Care team is always here to answer your questions about products, fit, comfort, and best practices. And if you're looking for more education, helpful tools, or additional support resources from trusted organizations, be sure to explore our [Incontinence Support page](#).



# Breaking the Silence Starts Here

Why is it easy to talk about surgery, hair loss, erectile dysfunction, but not leaks? Incontinence may feel taboo, but millions manage it every day. It doesn't define who you are. It doesn't make you weak. And it certainly doesn't mean you're alone or without options.

The more we talk, the less power stigma holds.  
The more we share, the more support becomes possible.  
Let's break the silence, together.



# Want to Try Before You Buy? Request Up to 6 Free Samples\* Today!

Finding the right incontinence products can feel overwhelming when shopping for yourself or a loved one. That's why NorthShore makes it simple: take a short quiz to get expert recommendations and select up to six free product samples to try. Plus, receive same-day shipping on orders placed on weekdays by 7pm Central. No more guessing. Just peace of mind.



[NorthShore.com/GetSamples](https://NorthShore.com/GetSamples)

\*Maximum of six samples per order, limited to a quantity of 1 per product. Delivery and taxes added in checkout, where applicable.

Need assistance? From personalized product recommendations to discreet delivery updates, NorthShore's expert Customer Care team is dedicated to helping you feel supported every step of the way.

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