

Weak bladders deter many young women from sports participation

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A weak bladder is putting many young women off participating in sport, or prompting them to give it up altogether, suggests research published ahead of print in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

The prevalence of urinary stress incontinence, defined as an involuntary leakage of urine, is relatively high among women, with some research putting the figure as high as 46%.

The researchers asked 679 Italian women about whether they had ever had urinary stress incontinence. All them were still having regular periods, and took part in non-competitive sports.

The anonymous responses showed that around 1 in 7 (15%) said they suffered from the condition. On average, the women had been putting up with the symptoms for six years.

Being overweight and having had children boosted the risk of urinary stress incontinence.

Of those affected, almost half said the condition occurred during routine activities, while one in three said it occurred solely during sporting activities. One in five said it occurred in both circumstances.

The most risky sports for women with the problem, in descending order of magnitude, were basketball, athletics, and tennis or squash.

Over half of those complaining of the problem experienced up to three episodes of involuntary leakage a month, but for around one in five the frequency of episodes exceeded more than three a week.

One in 10 women said that stress incontinence had prompted them to give up their favourite sport.

A further one in five said that the condition had restricted or forced them to change their activities, in a bid to avoid the risk of leakage.

The figures would have been considerably higher if women who had gone through the menopause had been included in the sample, say the authors.

They conclude that urinary stress incontinence impacts on the quality of women's lives, affecting many aspects of routine and recreational activities, but few women seek help for the condition, they say.

"They should be given information and offered diagnostic and conservative therapeutic options," including pelvic floor exercises, which can be very helpful, they add.

Source: British Medical Journal

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