

SUN LIFE

Hold it!

Light leakage is nothing to sneeze at

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Special to Postmedia

Eeek! We leak!

Be honest, did you wet your pants yet today? Sure that may be a little personal but leaking a little happens a lot. All it takes is a sneeze, cough or laugh. Lifting, jumping and doing stairs can bring on a dribble, too.

Many keep it hushed up, but it's a major annoyance — and you're not alone. Occasional light leaks, aka stress urinary incontinence, affect as many as one in three women, and many are under the age of 50.

So what's one to do about leaky plumbing? Please, no dreadful drugstore adult underwear, even if celebrity vixen Lisa Rinna looks amazing in Depends.

"All incontinence has significant impact on quality of life," says Dr. Catherine DuBeau, including unhappiness and social isolation. "Both patients and physicians often don't bring up the topic, leaving many women unaware of or without access to treatment."

Just what's up with our involuntary release of urine? Things like pregnancy, childbirth, age and being overweight can wreak havoc down there. Muscular and connective tissue components of the pelvic floor weaken so that the abdominal pressure from coughing, sneezing, and exercise is not countered by sufficient support to compress the urethra and keep it closed, says DuBeau, professor of medicine, division of Geriatric Medicine, UMass Medical School and an AFAR spokesperson.

Also, a drop in estrogen production can cause severe thinning of the lining of the urethra, damaging the urethral sphincter so it does not close, says DuBeau, a researcher specializing in incontinence. Past surgeries or scarring can also add to the urethral

sphincter problems.

But urine luck! It's highly treatable.

"Pelvic muscle exercises are the first step, which are moderately effective," says DuBeau. "Most successful is surgery. Another option is injection of a bulking agent into the wall of the urethra to help it stay closed; although effective, the effects decrease over time and the procedure has to be repeated."

In the meantime, consider an underwear upgrade — Knix-wear is not your grandmother's adult diaper. Toronto entrepreneur Joanna Griffiths offers high-performance underwear to target leaks, sweat and odour, with a combination of fashion, function and fit.

"We have women covered no matter what. We design products that women can feel great in, and that look exactly like a beautiful pair of underwear," says Griffiths, of Knix-wear.com.

Her undies, ranging from lace, seamless and athletic to thongs and highrise briefs, are now available in 300 retail locations in seven countries. They are leak-resistant, absorbent (up to three teaspoons of moisture), antimicrobial, de-odorizing and moisture wicking.

Sadly, urinary incontinence is not widely talked about, acknowledges Griffiths. "On average it can take a woman seven years before they talk to their doctor, and treatments like pelvic floor physiotherapy — that can be very effective — are not widely known."

Lifestyle and self-esteem are impacted by pee problems.

"When you are planning your day around where the nearest washroom is, or are never sure when an accident will occur, that can be very unsettling. On an emotional level, we give women confidence and peace of mind," adds Griffiths.

ADVICE

Rx for good bladder health, according to alternative medicine expert Bryce Wylde, of p3health.net

■ **Get tested:** Ask your specialist for an expanded quantitative urine analysis.

"The importance of good bacteria — the friendly probiotics that reside in your gut — are instrumental to support a healthy bladder," says Wylde.

■ **Get poked:** Evidence points toward acupuncture as helpful in relieving incontinence and symptoms related to an overactive bladder, says Wylde.

■ **Overactive mind, overactive bladder:** "Stress management including deep breathing and guided imagery can help you regain control of your body," he adds.

WATERWORKS

Don't be peeved! Avoid these 10 things that make incontinence worse, according to Bryce Wylde, alternative medicine expert at p3health.net:

- **Coffee, tea and you'll pee:** Caffeine is a bladder irritant and diuretic, too, so forgo the joe.
- **Don't add water.** Cut back on your fluid intake, but not too much or you'll end up dehydrated or constipated or both.
- **One drink too many.** Since alcohol is a diuretic, limit your intake.
- **Sugar can contribute to**

incontinence, so cut back.

- **Chocolate has caffeine** — just know you'll have to go.
- **Cranberry juice has an acidic pH level** which can irritate a bladder.
- **Shake off the curry, chili pepper and cayenne pepper.**
- **Acidic foods, like lemons, limes, grapefruit and oranges** can turn on the waterworks for urgency incontinence.
- **Check your meds.** Some medications can send you dribbling, or running for the bathroom, so check with your doctor or pharmacist.