

# Regaining control: new study sheds light on incontinence

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An Australian study has revealed that as many as one in eight healthy young women have urinary incontinence (UI).

Monash University honours student Tessa O'Halloran, together with Professors Susan Davis and Robin Bell, surveyed 1000 healthy young women in Melbourne looking at the issue that is commonly considered to be a problem experienced by older women.

“Our research found that UI affects 12.6 per cent of women under 30 years of age, unrelated to pregnancy, and is associated with impaired wellbeing,” said Ms O'Halloran.

“The findings are important as previous studies have shown that UI is clearly related to pregnancy and being overweight. However, the extent to which UI affects younger women who have never been pregnant has not been understood until now.”

The study was undertaken to determine the prevalence of UI in otherwise healthy young women aged 16 to 30 years who have never been pregnant (which is a known risk factor for developing urinary incontinence) using validated questionnaires to diagnose urinary incontinence and to determine factors associated with the likelihood of having UI.

The research showed that 12.6 per cent of surveyed women had [urinary incontinence](#), with most experiencing stress incontinence (6.2 per cent)

or urge incontinence (4.5 per cent). About 1.9 per cent of those surveyed experienced both.

“We found that women are more likely to have incontinence if they had been sexually active, however this was 50 per cent less likely amongst this group if they were taking the oral contraceptive pill. Interestingly, women were more likely to experience incontinence if they had a history of bedwetting after the age of five,” said Ms O’Halloran.

This is the first study of its kind to be conducted in women who have never experienced a pregnancy and demonstrates that there is a significant proportion of women who are vulnerable to incontinence irrespective of [pregnancy](#) or obesity.

“I encourage [young women](#) who are experiencing this problem to speak to a medical practitioner to learn how to best manage the problem in the short-term and then to prevent a worsening of the condition in later life,” said Ms O’Halloran.

The research will be presented at the 15th Australasian Menopause Society Congress, which will be held in Brisbane between 9-11 September 2011.

Provided by Monash University

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