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It should come as no surprise that incontinence, which affects millions of people, has a significant emotional and psychological impact on those who suffer from the condition, and when left untreated can exact a hefty toll on quality of life. At the very least, incontinence is embarrassing and distressing, and for these reasons, many people fail to report it to their physician. Additionally, many people also associate incontinence with old age—and loss of independence—which may be another reason incontinence goes unreported.

Because of the unpredictable nature of incontinence, the condition has a tremendous impact on social and work situations, sexual intimacy, and relationships. In some cases, incontinence has even led to premature admittance to a nursing home. However, it is important to remember that incontinence is treatable and manageable.

### **Social Avoidance**

All types of incontinence have the potential to cause embarrassment. With urge incontinence, sometimes the amount of fluid lost is so large that it will even leak through an absorbent pad. Since stress incontinence can be triggered by sexual activity, people suffering from incontinence may avoid sexual contact, or intimate relationships altogether. Regardless of the type of incontinence, having the condition results in some degree of anxiety and may lead to social isolation.

Worrying about whether you will lose bladder control on the bus, at your boss's dinner party or while at the post office is a huge reason that some people prefer to stay home. Disruption to a regular routine may cause a great deal of anxiety, and people will opt out of a social invitation. Work may suffer as well, if avoidance of invitations or concern about a change in routine causes a person to turn away opportunities. Limiting contact with friends, relatives, or colleagues can have a dramatic impact on someone's quality of life, and it is easy to see how incontinence can lead to depression.

### **Depression**

Incontinence, and its potential to cause withdrawal and anxiety, may lead to depression. Experts have found a link

## **Risks and Effects of Incontinence**

Despite the fact that incontinence affects millions of people, it is not widely discussed. At the very least, incontinence is embarrassing to the person who suffers from it. Unfortunately, incontinence often goes untreated because people are reluctant to inform their physician. If left untreated, incontinence can have a significant impact on quality of life.

- » Embarrassment/humiliation
- » Social avoidance
- » Avoidance of sexual intimacy
- » Anxiety
- » Depression
- » Rash or skin infection
- » Unpleasant odor

between female incontinence and depression, according to several studies. Researchers reported in the 2005 issue of *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, that depression was nearly triple in women with female incontinence versus those without. This result is corroborated by another study, published in the 2005 *Social Science Medicine*, which found a link between incontinence and depression in both women and men. Interestingly, this study also found that the husband of an incontinent spouse is also more susceptible to depression, even if he is not incontinent himself.

### **Physical Impact**

In addition to the emotional impact that incontinence has, there are physical side effects as well. Urinary or fecal incontinence causes skin breakdown and increases the risk for skin irritation, ulcers, and infection.