

Study reveals that '73% of people assume only elderly women suffer with urinary incontinence.'

Submitted by: Natracare

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A YouGov study facilitated by the period brand Natracare revealed that '73% of people assume only elderly women suffer with urinary incontinence.' This assumption of the condition is widespread, when in fact 'one in three women experience incontinence at some point in their life' - at any age.

Furthermore, both men and women can be affected by incontinence or bladder weakness. It may occur throughout and/or after pregnancy or may be caused by health implications.

As part of their investigation into the issue, Natracare have been speaking with individuals who experience incontinence to understand how it impacts young people in particular.

Julie, age 34, explains "I started to occasionally leak during pregnancy with my first daughter, 4 years ago. I've experienced it ever since then. When I'm doing sport it's particularly bad, but it can also be when I'm sneezing if my bladder is a bit full."

At the age of 26, Gaby began experiencing incontinence following a spell of physical health problems which had caused her to be wheelchair-bound; "Luckily with the help of physical therapy I began walking again, but I started to suffer from incontinence. All the Kegels in the world just weren't enough to overcome it. At 26 I shouldn't be having incontinence, especially not all day and in my sleep. How do you handle this at my age?"

Regardless of age or gender, the nature of incontinence can bring about feelings of embarrassment and shame. The survey by Natracare uncovered that many people feel too embarrassed to discuss incontinence with a health care professional. Only 11% of the women surveyed had spoken about urinary incontinence with a friend, and 6% with a nurse.

"It's uncomfortable, it's embarrassing and when you have urine seeping through your underwear, you don't exactly feel like a confident woman," explains Gaby.

Julie adds "I wish people knew how common it is, and therefore talked about it more. I have had one or two conversations with other mums about it, and it's been so refreshing to have a bit of a giggle and moan about our experiences. It has helped me feel less shameful about it."

Stigma around incontinence also appears to be getting in the way of people choosing the right product. Shockingly, of the women surveyed who had experienced incontinence, 41% had chosen to use period pads or liners instead of specialised incontinence products – and over 24% have never used any products to manage bladder leakage.

A report from Leeds University supports these survey findings, with the discovery that some women are so embarrassed by the idea of incontinence, they would choose to have wet knickers, rather than use anything at all.

Gaby's experiences match up with these insights: "The last thing I wanted to do was stare at incontinence products, so I did what most girls my age would do - use sanitary towels."

Like many, Julie often has products close to hand: "When I know I'm going to be out all day, or carrying the kids lots, then I'll wear extra protection such as a liner. When I've had a cold, so I'm sneezing or coughing, then I'll usually need to wear more absorbent pads. I refuse to give up sport, despite my bladder weakness, so I wear a pair of period pants to ensure I'm covered."

According to Sharna Waid from Natracare, the real cause for concern here is whether stigma is impacting on people's recovery from the problem:

"Research shows that 84% of women are cured of stress incontinence after 6 sessions of pelvic floor physiotherapy, and yet women wait on average seven years before seeking help³. The fact that most people assume only elderly women experience incontinence further perpetuates shame and stigma around the condition and we need to do more to normalise the condition amongst young people and educate from an earlier age. During our research we've found people are really willing to share their experiences so we hope to amplify their voices and help others seek support faster."

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For more information, product samples and high-res images, please contact:
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Notes to editors:

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,182 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between in December 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

Natracare is the first company in the world to provide plastic-free, certified organic cotton tampons and totally chlorine-free sanitary pads, panty liners and incontinence products. Natracare products are biodegradable and can even be composted. Susie Hewson created the brand in 1989 in response to the growing danger to human health and the environment from dioxin pollution in the pulping industries with the chlorine bleaching of paper products.