



I don't think I'll be able to run without wetting myself

If you think that you won't be able to run without wetting yourself then you're in good company.

Bladder incontinence is still unfortunately a taboo subject and there is a great deal of ignorance surrounding it

A number of our beginners, who have now gone on to become regular club runners, were also dubious about whether they'd be able to cope.

A weak bladder can occur for a number of reasons, including pregnancy, childbirth, obesity, constipation, nerve damage, menopause or even smoker's cough. People who suffer bladder weakness may avoid taking exercise, walking, travelling and even sex but weakness of the pelvic floor muscles is often the underlying problem

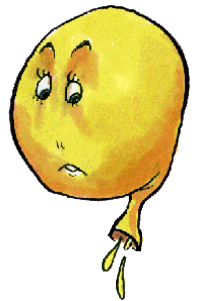
Many women have problems with stress incontinence (leakage of urine when coughing, sneezing, jumping running etc) as this can unfortunately be a consequence of childbirth and menopause. Stress incontinence occurs because the pelvic floor muscles at the neck of the bladder are not strong enough to hold the urine in when the pressure in the abdomen is increased.

Start or keep doing pelvic floor exercises, (see www.embarassingproblems.com for a good description of how to do them-search under urinary incontinence) but if you're impatient to start running, it is still possible.

Running does actually strengthen pelvic floor muscles, but if you start with a problem of stress incontinence, crossed fingers may not be enough. It's difficult to run with crossed legs or a clenched pelvic floor (believe me it's been tried (the clenched pelvic floor anyway!)) and you will find it easier to concentrate on developing and enjoying your running if you have the reassurance of using some pads as protection.

If you wear loose clothing (and many club members do out of choice) no-one will know as there are suitable and discreet products on the market. The TENA range of pads are good and being purposely designed are much better than sanitary products which are less absorbent for the same bulk. Tena have a website www.tena.co.uk which is helpful in identifying which product might be most suitable and you can send off for free samples.

Along with incontinence pads, (Tena Lady; Poise; Boots own brand and Sainsbury's own brand), Bodyform are currently selling (99p in savers) a 2in1 pantiliner/towel. The Bodyform product is slightly thicker than a pantliner, but holds the same amount as a towel. Although not specifically



designed for stress incontinence a number of consumers do purchase these less bulky products for this purpose. They are less bulky than Tena lady and so offer protection with freedom of movement.

Tampon manufacturers in their leaflets do not recommend the use of tampons when women are not menstruating, (this is mainly targeted at controlling vaginal discharge and use over extended periods of time), however there are a large number of gynaecologists who do advocate the use of tampons as a method of controlling stress incontinence, when women are exercising. The tampon works by putting pressure on the urethra, compressing it and preventing urine from leaking out. Several gynaecologists in the UK, who use this method to help their “leaky ladies” but if you have either a urinary tract or vaginal infection it is not advised.

When inserting the tampon they recommend that ladies use KY-Jelly on the nose of the tampon, this helps the dry fibres from sticking to the vaginal walls which may cause soreness. It will also help with tampon removal. The tampon should be inserted just before exercising and removed as soon after as possible. They advise that it is “safe” to use tampons in this way, if they are worn only for a few hours. Many women prefer tampons over towels/pads as a more discreet way of controlling stress incontinence when exercising.

There are lubricated tampons on the market, available in Boots, Superdrug and other retailers; these are called Lil-lets Extra Comfort. The tampons are individually wrapped with their own specially formulated gel

Running has driven at least one of us to accept the inevitable and go to the GP to get referred for a more permanent medical solution to the problem, however whilst she's been waiting for an assessment at least she can still run

