



Because

Overcoming the Stigma of Incontinence:

Breaking the Silence on a
Common Condition

Introduction

Incontinence is a common condition that affects over **25 million Americans**. Despite its prevalence, there is still a significant stigma attached to the condition, which can make it difficult for individuals to live their lives to the fullest. Overcoming the stigma of bladder leaks can help individuals get the right tools and resources they need to live each day with confidence.

This paper aims to explore the attitudes and beliefs of those who experience incontinence and provide **helpful ways to overcome the stigma** around this common health condition.

The paper will cover the following:

- 1 What is Stigma and why it is Harmful**
- 2 How the Bladder Leak Stigma Harms Older Adults**
- 3 Attitudes towards Living with Incontinence**
- 4 Tips for Overcoming Incontinence Stigma**



25
million

What Is Stigma And Why Is It Harmful?

Stigma is the word used to describe negative attitudes or discriminatory thoughts or behaviors towards someone based on a distinguishing characteristic. This could include a health issue such as incontinence, mental health, or disability.

Stigmas can be harmful because they can **prevent an individual from getting the help or treatment they need** to help successfully manage their condition. Stigmas can result in:

- Reluctance to ask for help or get treatment
- Lack of understanding by friends and loved ones
- Feelings of loneliness or depression
- Fewer opportunities to socialize or participate in planned activities
- The belief that you'll never improve your situation



How The Bladder Leak Stigma Harms Older Adults

Experts widely acknowledge the importance of social connections in adulthood, particularly for adults over 65. Studies show that seniors with strong social ties are **more active than those who lack them**. Increased physical activity can mean **lower risk** of heart attack, stroke, heart disease, and other severe medical conditions. **Seniors who regularly socialize** are also less likely to suffer from fatigue, insomnia, depression, or anxiety, and to engage in unhealthy behaviors like misusing alcohol and smoking. The social dimension of health is equally as important as the physical and mental dimensions.

Unfortunately, the bladder leak taboo interferes with socialization for far too many. Concerns about having accidents in public can make individuals avoid peers and relatives. Those with incontinence may spend more time at home alone out of fear of what might happen if they go out and experience leaks. In addition, they may want to avoid telling other people why they're not attending events or going out anymore. This further increases **a sense of isolation**, causing those who experience bladder leaks to feel like they have a shameful secret to hide. Over time, this can lead to low self-esteem and a lack of **self-confidence**.

The good news is that it's possible for people with incontinence to lead full, active lives. **Bladder protection products** can play a role, but so can simply talking about bladder leaks. When it becomes common knowledge that leaks are a part of daily life for millions, those living with them can enjoy their lives with less worry.

What We Found From Talking To Men And Women With Incontinence

As a first step toward getting people talking, we recently conducted a survey among **150 men and women who experience bladder leaks** to learn more about how bladder leaks have impacted their lives. Here are some eye-opening facts we learned from their responses.

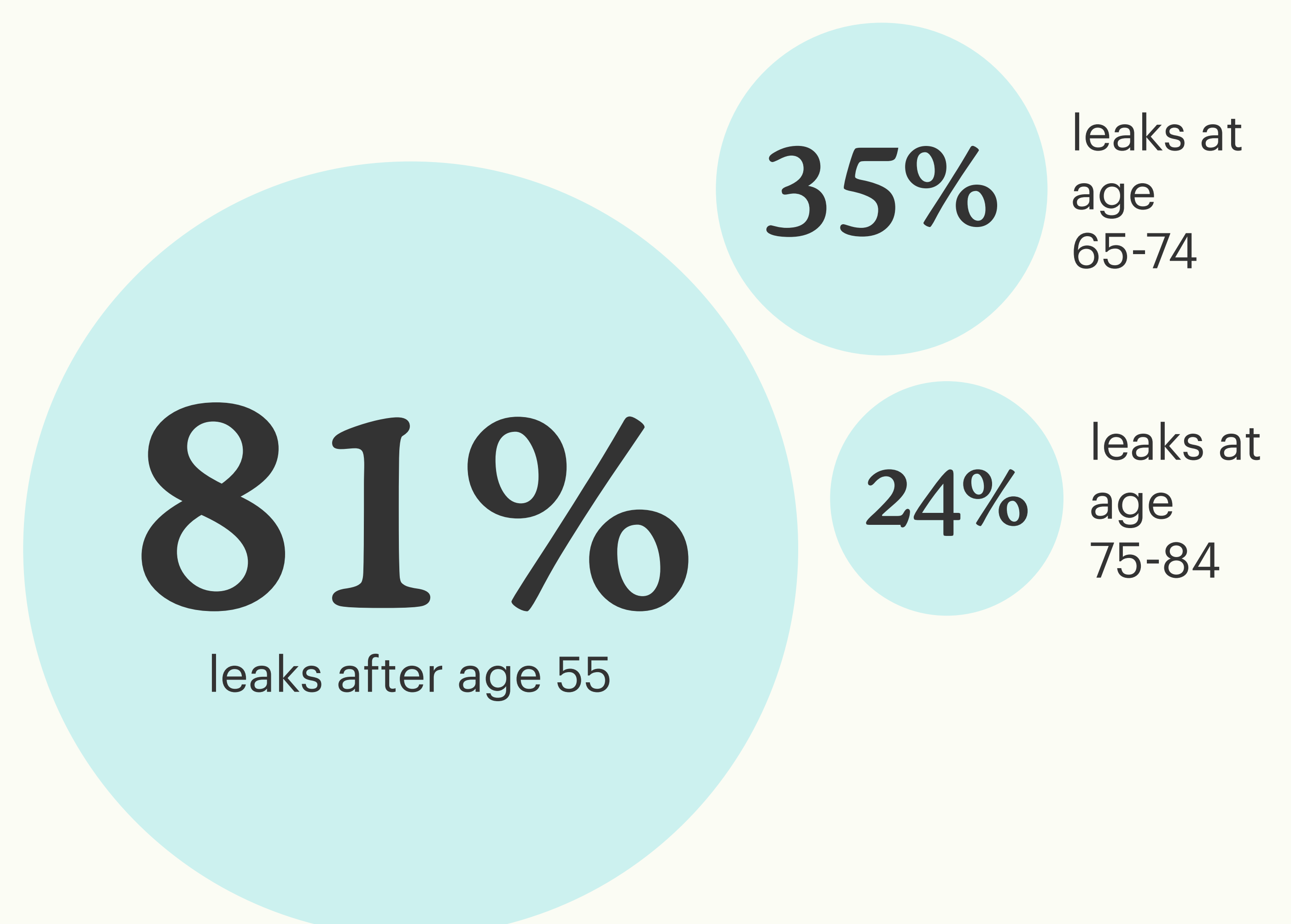
Most People Don't Feel Comfortable Talking About Bladder Leaks

Discussing incontinence, even with their closest family members, is still a sensitive subject for most. More than half (**52%**) of respondents felt uncomfortable discussing bladder leaks with others, and **69%** felt embarrassed. Only **19%** were willing to speak to their spouse or significant other about bladder leaks, and just about a fourth of respondents talked about incontinence

with their family, doctor, or healthcare professionals. **5%** stated they don't tell anyone about bladder leaks.

Bladder Leaks Tend To Start Later In Life

Incontinence becomes more common with age, and our survey results reflect that. In total, **81%** of people started experiencing leaks after age 55. Around one-quarter (**24%**) first developed symptoms between the ages of 75 and 84, and **35%** started having leaks when they were 65 to 74.



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69% Felt embarrassed about bladder leaks

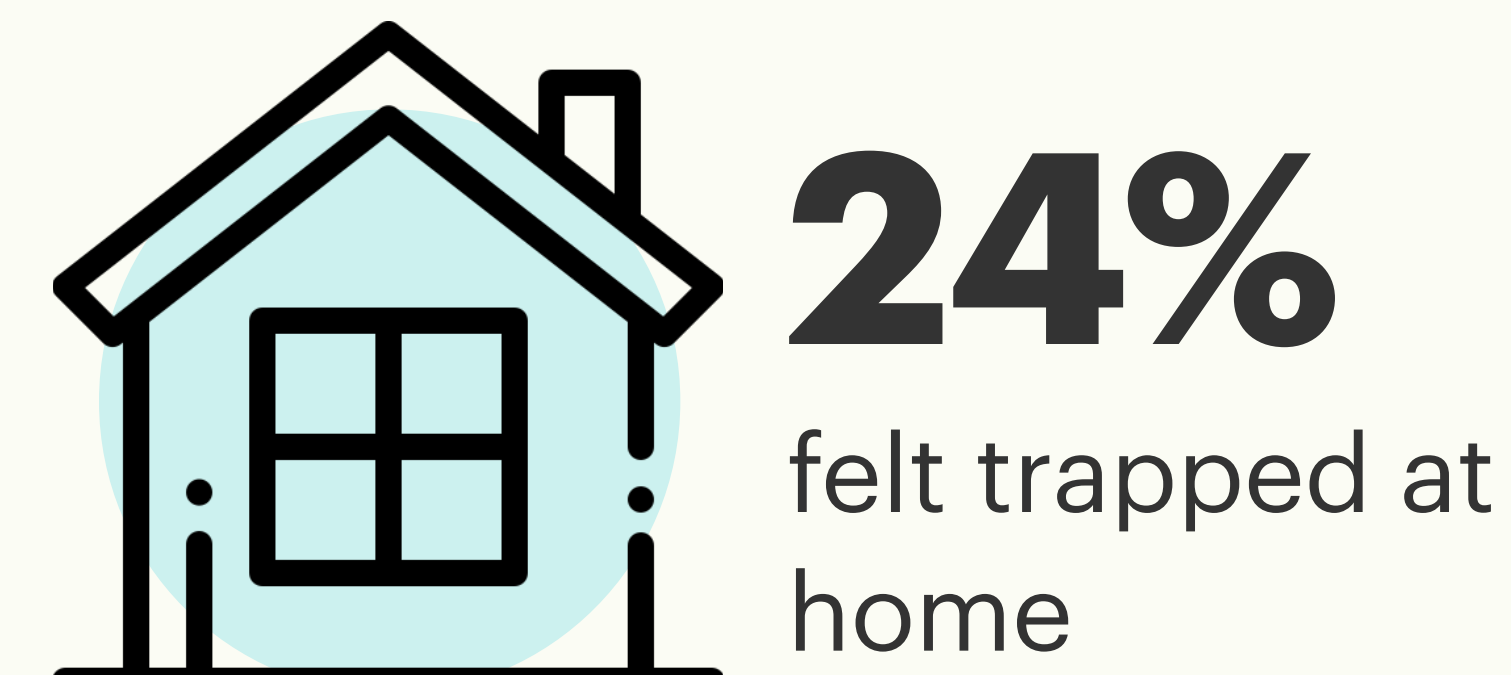
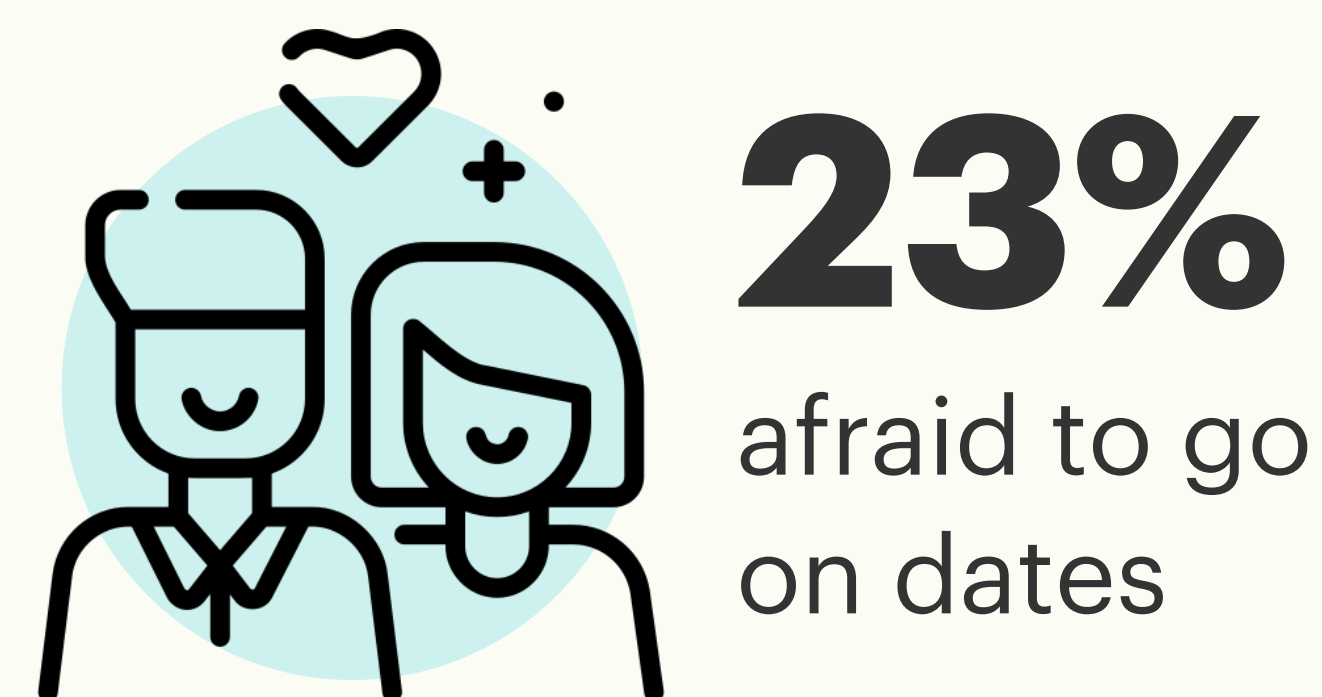
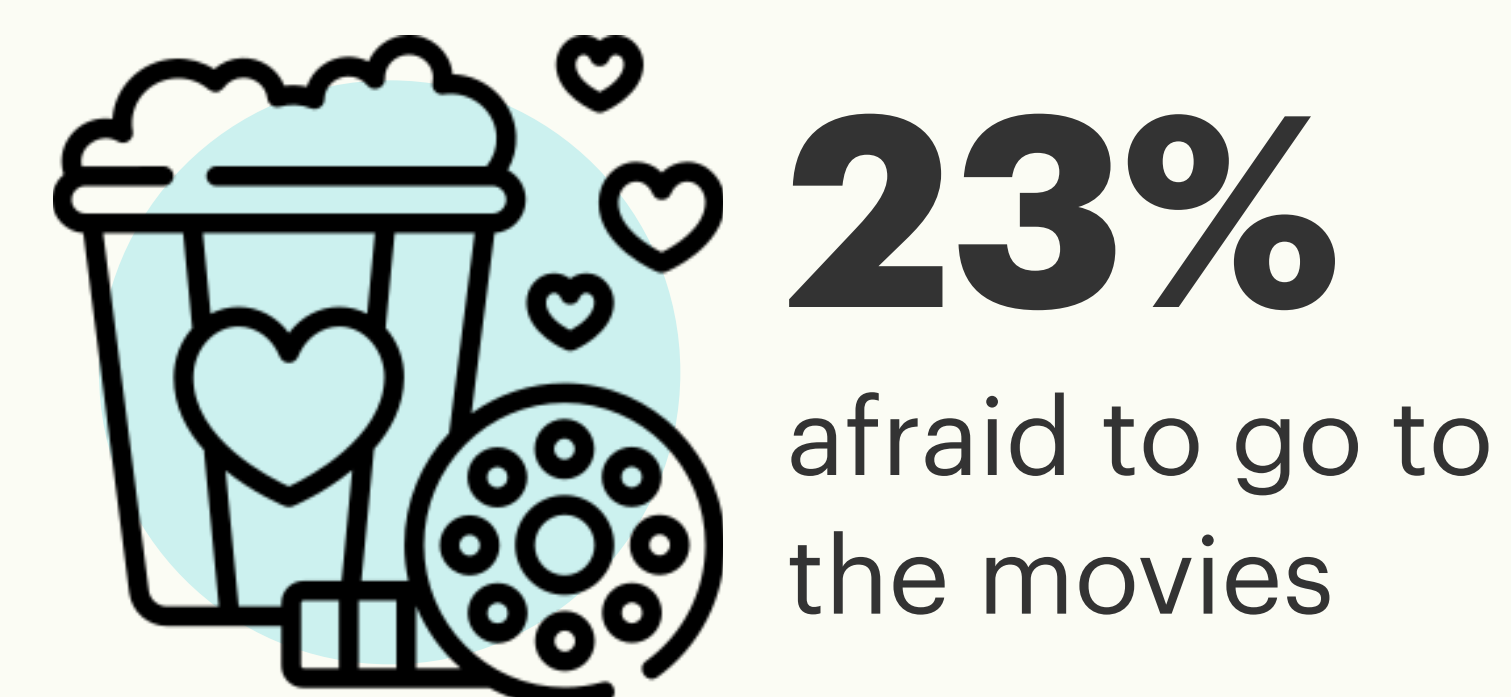
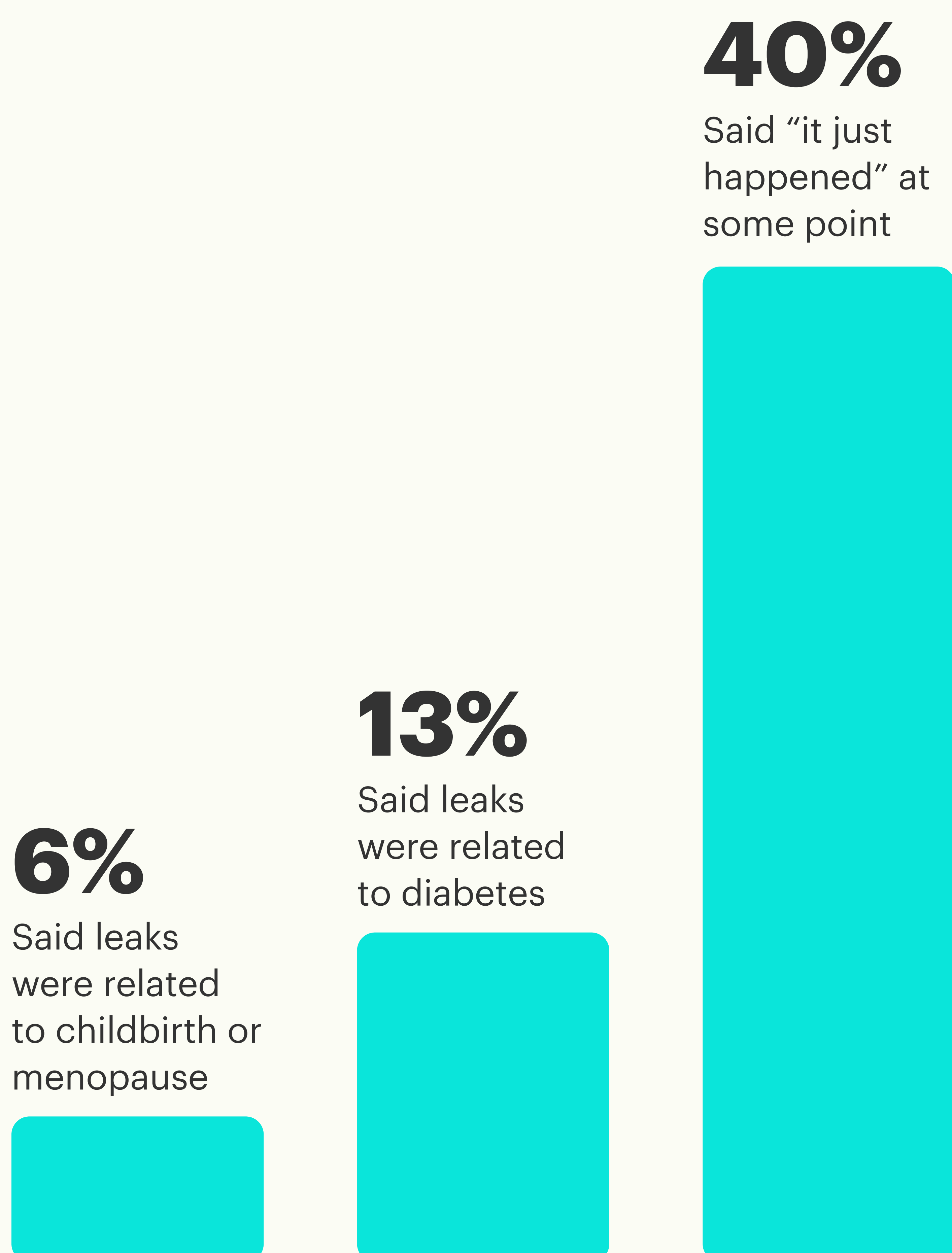
19% Willing to speak with a spouse or significant other

5% Don't tell anyone about bladder leaks

Not Knowing Why It Happened Is Far Too Normal

Although most people can estimate when they first experienced leaks, few know the actual cause of their symptoms. Around **40%** said that "it just happened" at some point. Only **13%** stated that diabetes led to incontinence. The childbirth and menopause responses were each selected by **6%** of respondents.

Part of why many people don't know what led to their incontinence issues is likely to be social taboos. Most respondents are not comfortable discussing symptoms with healthcare professionals, so most people don't seek official diagnoses. **This effect increases isolation** and robs those with incontinence of the opportunity to seek treatments that may lead to more comfortable solutions.



Bladder Leaks Negatively Impact Daily Life

Our survey also showed how bladder leaks rob too many older adults of having full lives. We found that:

- **39%** avoided traveling because of bladder issues
- **23%** were afraid to go to the movies because of their bladders
- **23%** were afraid to date because of incontinence
- **24%** felt trapped at home because of bladder leaks

Finding The Right Incontinence Protection Is Key

Two-thirds of survey participants said that leaking through their clothes was their number one concern — and the **most significant barrier to feeling comfortable and free in their daily lives**. Adequate incontinence protection can go a long way toward eliminating this worry and allowing those experiencing bladder leaks to engage in more social activities.

6 Tips For Overcoming The Stigma Of Bladder Leaks

If you or a loved one experience bladder leaks, here are some strategies for overcoming stigma associated with this condition.

1 Educate yourself about incontinence

You may feel embarrassed, but incontinence is a condition that affects **over 25 million people** in the US. “Educating yourself about the condition will not only build your understanding and acceptance but also give you helpful tips on managing the condition,” says Dr. Ketan Parmar, MD psychiatrist and mental health expert at [ClinicSpots](#). Talking with your doctor can help you understand the causes of your symptoms and your options for treatment. Treatment may provide relief that will enable you to minimize disruption to your life.

2 Learn to manage the condition

Finding the right products and routine is not a one size fits all approach, and finding the right tools to help you manage your daily activities without

leaks is essential. Experiment with different types of products, such as bladder protection underwear, pads, or boosters to see what works best for you. You may find that a combination of products works best, depending on your needs.

3 Don't let incontinence create self-doubt

You may mistakenly believe that experiencing incontinence is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help. Incontinence is a medical condition like other physical illnesses that requires treatment and care. Refusing to equate yourself with your condition can help you gain self-esteem and overcome self-judgment. “Engaging in self-care activities can help you **become more confident and comfortable** with your condition,” says Dr. Parmar. “Relaxing activities such as yoga, journaling, and spending time with friends can help manage stress levels while also helping to boost self-esteem.”



4 Join a community

While you may be reluctant to share your condition with friends and family right away, reaching out to others who also experience bladder leaks may provide emotional relief. Join an **online community to connect with others** who can relate and empathize with your experience. There are **Facebook communities available to both women and men** that can help you connect with others who will be compassionate and may even offer helpful advice. “Seeking therapy or joining a support group are great opportunities to learn how to cope with incontinence while feeling supported by those who understand your experience,” adds Dr. Parmar.



5 Talk with your loved ones

Consider talking openly about your bladder leaks, starting with your close friends and loved ones. Educating yourself and others, being conscious of language, and drawing comparisons between bladder leaks and other physical health matters can help to **normalize incontinence**.

“It can be intimidating to talk about something as intimate as incontinence to a doctor or family member,” says Dr. Parmar. “However, it’s important to remember that these conversations can be beneficial for your overall well-being. To make the discussion less daunting and more comfortable, try writing down your questions ahead of time, so you won’t forget them at the moment. Additionally, ask questions that are specific and relevant to your condition – this will help the other person understand what kind of help you need from them.”

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– Dr. Ketan Parmar

6 Embrace less stigmatizing language

Examining the language we use with ourselves or our loved ones can also be a helpful step in the process of de-stigmatizing bladder leaks. Here are some commonly used terms to watch:

| Commonly used terms | A less stigmatizing choice | Why it matters |
|---------------------|--|---|
| He's incontinent | He has incontinence He experiences bladder leaks | The preferred terms emphasize that the person *has* a problem rather than *is* the problem. |
| Adult diaper | Bladder leak underwear Bladder protection underwear Incontinence underwear | The preferred terms do not infantilize a condition that is common among older adults |
| He had an accident | He had an underwear leak He has soiled pants/clothing | The preferred terms avoid guilt and shaming when a leak occurs |

Conclusion

Incontinence can be a challenging condition to manage, but it's essential to remember that you're not alone. For more support regarding the topic of incontinence, visit our [blog](#) or shop our website at www.BecauseMarket.com.





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