

Latest News from ETHICON Women's Health & Urology

Survey Reveals the Stressful Secrets of Women's Health: Women Would Keep Stress Urinary Incontinence Secret from Their Boyfriends or Husbands, STDs Such as Herpes from Their Best Girlfriends or Sisters

Somerville, N.J. (April 16, 2003) – According to a recent survey about the most “secret worthy” health conditions,* women are most likely to keep an embarrassing health problem from the men in their lives. More than eight out of every 10 women agreed they would try to keep secret at least one or more conditions from their boyfriends or husbands, and identified stress urinary incontinence (SUI), or “leaking” when you laugh, cough or sneeze, as the condition most of them (55%) would want to keep secret from this group.

[* Embarrassing health conditions tested include a yeast infection, a sexually transmitted disease like herpes, excessive body hair, urine loss caused by laughing, sneezing or physical activities, body odor and irritable bowel syndrome, which can cause cramping, diarrhea, bloating and constipation.]

Following the men, women said they would be most likely to try to keep health secrets from their best girlfriends or sisters. More than half of women surveyed (56%) said they would keep a health condition secret from their closest girlfriends and nearly half (46%) said they would keep a secret from their own sisters, with STDs such as herpes leading the field of conditions they'd want to keep from their female friends.

Overall, nearly nine out of 10 women would keep at least one embarrassing health condition from the persons closest to them. STDs and SUI were considered the most “secret worthy” overall, followed by irritable bowel syndrome, body odor, excessive body hair and yeast infections. More than one in four women (28%) said they would even try to keep at least one or more of these health conditions secret from their doctors.

"I suspect that many more women keep SUI secret, not only because they consider it embarrassing but also because they don't know that treatment is available," said Dr. Margaret Loewith, an OB/GYN from Virginia Hospital, commenting on the survey. "These women carry the stress of coping with the condition as well as the added stress of keeping it a secret from their loved ones."

The conditions deemed the most "secret worthy" – STDs and SUI – also were perceived as the least treatable. Less than half of women surveyed said they considered STDs (42%) or SUI (49%) as very or extremely treatable. Conversely, the conditions considered the least "secret worthy" – yeast infections, excessive body hair and body odor – were identified as the most treatable. The survey also shows that awareness about treatments can be an important motivator for women to talk with their doctors. While 70 percent of women said they would "definitely" speak to a doctor about SUI, if they knew a treatment was available that figure rose to 83 percent. Compounding the stress of secret-keeping are varying estimates of how common SUI is among women. In the survey, more than 80 percent of respondents said they believe SUI is a common women's health concern. SUI occurs when muscles and pelvic tissue surrounding the urethra (the tube from the bladder through which urine exits the body) have weakened. Common causes of SUI include strenuous exercise, childbirth, loss of pelvic muscle tone, loss of estrogen, obesity and gynecologic surgery. As a result, women with the condition will uncontrollably "leak" urine during sudden movements, such as a laugh or cough, or during exercise.

"An estimated eight million women suffer from SUI," said Dr. Loewith. "Considering how prevalent SUI is, I wish there were more awareness for treatment options. When more conservative therapies fail, women should consider innovative new treatments such as GYNECARE TVT** Tension-free Support for Incontinence. The entire procedure takes 30 minutes and many patients can leave the hospital the same day." Dr. Loewith herself

suffered from stress incontinence until she underwent the TVT treatment, and she now offers the procedure to her patients.

Minimally invasive GYNECARE TVT Tension-free Support is used in a simple, outpatient procedure. The GYNECARE TVT device uses a mesh sling to provide support to the middle of the urethra, the section that is strained during physical activities. This positioning of the device provides support only when needed and creates a “Tension-Free” treatment solution that reduces the risk of over-correcting. Long-term data show that four to six years after treatment, 85 percent of women treated with GYNECARE TVT Tension-free Support remained dry and an additional 11 percent remained significantly improved.

To date, more than 500,000 women worldwide have been treated with GYNECARE TVT Tension-free Support. As with any surgery of this kind, the procedure should not be performed in pregnant patients or patients who plan future pregnancies, since childbirth can negate the results of the surgery. Although rare, complications associated with the device include injury to blood vessels or nerves, difficulty urinating and bladder and bowel injury.

This survey was sponsored by ETHICON in February 2003. Results are based on a telephone study conducted by Opinion Research Corporation among a national probability sample of 1,042 women 18 and older in the continental U.S. The study was conducted February 6-10, 2003 and has a margin of error of plus or minus three percent.

ETHICON Women's Health & Urology, a division of JOHNSON & JOHNSON MEDICAL LIMITED is a global health care company dedicated to advancing



healthcare for women worldwide. The company offers less-invasive options for the treatment of menorrhagia (excessive menstrual bleeding), fibroids, pelvic adhesions, and female urinary incontinence.

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