

SBU Continence Advisory Services

How to Maintain a Healthy Bladder and Bowel

A normal bladder:

- Will empty every 3 to 4 hours.
- Can hold about 400mls -600mls of urine comfortably.
- May wake you up once a night.
- Will give you enough warning to get to the toilet.
- Will empty completely each time you pass urine.
- Will not leak.

A normal bowel:

- Produces a soft, formed easy-to-pass motion.
- Can work up to three times per day but no less than three times per week.
- Does not require you to strain.

To keep the bladder and bowel healthy you should:

- Drink at least 10-12 cups of fluid per day, including at least 5 glasses of water. This will help to keep your kidneys healthy. Reducing your fluid intake will make your urine darker and cause further bladder irritation.
- Cutting down on caffeine (found in tea, coffee, hot chocolate, cola, high-energy drinks and green tea).
- Perform pelvic floor exercises.
- Avoid constipation by eating plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Pass urine only when you need to, never go 'just in case'.
- Keep as active and as mobile as you can
- Try to manage your weight; being overweight will cause extra strain on your pelvic floor muscle.
- Make sure you are able to reach the toilet with ease and that your clothes are adjustable.

Bladder Training

The aim of bladder training is to re-establish normal control of the bladder. Provided you do the exercises with determination, you should see a significant improvement.

- Complete the three-day input/output fluid chart provided. This will show how often you pass urine, and the amount. You should also record the type and amount of fluid you drink.
- The training programme requires you to gradually increase the time interval between passing urine.
- Most people who start bladder training find it hard at first, and you may find you leak slightly more for a short time, but you will usually start to see an improvement within a few weeks.

Bladder Urge Suppression Techniques

The following may be useful to help to suppress the urge to pass urine.

- Stop what you are doing and cross legs, avoid rushing to toilet in mid urge.
- Perform a pelvic floor squeeze (see below).
- Walking on toes or change position, relaxed breathing.
- Distraction, read, sing or count backwards
- Avoid panicking and stay calm for a couple of minutes.
- Sit down and press the spine against the back of the chair.

Pelvic Floor Exercises

How should I do pelvic floor exercises?

Choose any comfortable position, with your knees slightly apart. Now imagine that you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind and at the same time trying to stop your flow of urine.

The feeling is one of 'squeeze and lift', closing and drawing-up the back and front passages.

Do these two together and you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles.

When you have learned the exercises try to perform them as below:

Non-hold exercises

Tighten and relax the muscles without holding. This helps the muscles to stop the urine leaking when you sneeze, laugh or exercise.

Holding exercises

Gradually tighten the muscles and hold for a few seconds (the amount may be indicated by your health professional); eventually aiming to count up to 10. This helps the muscles provide support for your bladder and bowel.

The quality of the contractions are more important than the quantity. Fewer good exercises are better than many half-hearted ones!

Build up to doing 10 slow (holding) exercises and 10 non-hold exercises four times each day. It really is worth the effort! Progress will be slow before you notice improvements, but do not give up.

If you do the exercises regularly and correctly, you will start to see improvements within a few months. Remember you need to continue the exercises for life.

There are smartphone apps that you can download to also help you with prompts, alerts etc. (NHS recommends 'Squeezy').

For further advice, please contact your local Continence Team between 9.00am and 4.00pm (an answer phone service is available on each number, but messages may not be answered on the day that they are left).

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