



Understanding Pelvic Floor Health

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HEALTH

Definitions

- **Frequency:** Feeling the need to empty your bladder many times, usually more than 8, in a 24-hour period. This can be in both normal and less-than-normal amounts of urine.
- **Incontinence:** Leaking that you cannot control. Urinary incontinence varies from dribbling of urine after sneezing, coughing, or laughing to completely emptying the bladder. There are several types of urinary incontinence:
 - **Functional Incontinence:** When your bladder is working normally but a physical or mental problem does not allow you to reach the toilet in time, such as having a broken leg.
 - **Overflow Incontinence:** Your bladder does not empty completely causing urine to leak often or continually.
 - **Stress Incontinence:** Urine leaks when you put pressure on the bladder by laughing, coughing, sneezing, exercising, or lifting something heavy.
 - **Urge Incontinence or Overactive Bladder (OAB):** A sudden, strong urge to urinate followed by urine leaking that you cannot control. You may need to urinate often.
 - **Pelvic Organ Prolapse:** When one or more organs in the pelvis are no longer in their normal position.
- **Urge:** A normal feeling that you need to empty your bladder. This feeling gets stronger the longer you wait.
- **Urgency:** A sudden, strong need to empty your bladder that is difficult to ignore.
- **Urinate/Urination:** To empty your bladder of urine.

Thank you for choosing Sanford Health for your care. Our goal is to help you understand pelvic floor health and how our services can help you. Pelvic floor health is important at every age. The pelvic floor clinic will provide you with the tools and treatments you need to improve your concerns and enjoy a better quality of life.

Bladder Health

Most of us expect our bladder to work. We only notice our bladder when it does not work as it should. Bladder problems are common, more often in women. They may be improved by:

- Practicing good toilet habits
- Retraining your bladder
- Spacing your fluid intake throughout the day
- Exercising your pelvic floor muscles

How Should My Bladder Work?

- As your bladder fills with urine, it stretches. The stretching sends your body a signal that the bladder needs to be emptied. This signal is called an urge.
- An adult's bladder can hold about 2 cups of urine before feeling the urge to empty your bladder.
- Most people empty their bladder 6 to 8 times in 24-hours.
- As you get older, the amount of urine the bladder can hold gets smaller. You may need to pass urine more often but usually not more than every 2 hours.
- Urine should flow easily without discomfort. It should flow in a good, steady stream until the bladder is empty. You should not need to push or strain to empty your bladder.

What Are Good Bladder Habits?

- Be in a relaxed position when emptying your bladder.
- Take your time emptying your bladder.
 - Do not rush.
 - Do not strain or push to empty your bladder more quickly.
- Empty your bladder when it is full. It is usually not necessary to empty your bladder when you feel the first urge but do not ignore it completely.
- Empty your bladder at least every 4 hours while you are awake.
- Avoid passing your urine more often than every 2 hours. It is usually not necessary to go when you feel the first urge. Try to go only when your bladder is full.
- Urinate after sex to flush away bacteria that may have entered the urethra during sex.

Tips for Good Bladder Habits

- Eat a balanced diet, high in dietary fiber to avoid constipation.
- Stop smoking.
 - Chronic coughing puts pressure on the bladder, making incontinence worse.
 - Smoking increases your risk of having bladder cancer.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight can put pressure on your bladder.
- Exercise regularly. Physical activity 3 to 5 days a week can help prevent and control bladder problems, constipation, and weight gain.
- Do pelvic floor muscle exercises each day.
- Women should wipe from front to back after using the toilet.

Food and Fluids Affect Your Bladder

Making a few changes to what you eat and drink may help control bladder problems.

Fluid Intake and Your Bladder

Drink enough fluids.

- Drink about 6 to 8 cups (8oz each) of fluid per day unless your doctor says otherwise.
- Drink more when your environment is hot and when you are exercising, working hard, or not feeling well.
- Space your fluid intake throughout the day.
- If you do not take in enough fluids, your urine will have a strong odor and dark color. It will:
 - Be more irritating to your bladder
 - Encourage the growth of bacteria, which can cause infections and incontinence

Water is the best choice of drink to keep your bladder healthy. Other options that do not irritate the bladder include:

- Grape and apple juices
- Low acid fruits such as pears, apricots, papaya, watermelon
- For coffee drinks try Kava[®], Postum[®], Pero[®], Kaffree Roma[®]
- For tea drinks try decaffeinated, non-citrus, herbal

Foods and Fluids That Can Irritate the Bladder

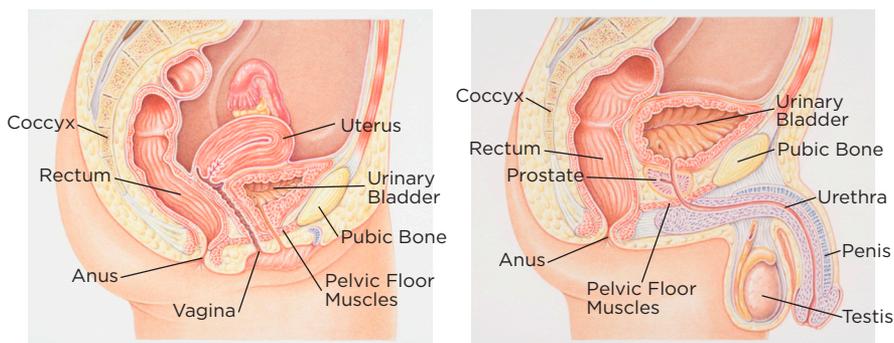
Some foods and fluids are thought to irritate the bladder and increase leaking. Because we are all different, some may have more effect on your bladder than others. Try removing or cutting down on your intake of one of these items at a time:

- Artificial sweeteners
- Foods and fluids high in acid
- Food colorings and flavorings
- Spicy foods
- Curry
- Tomato products
- Vinegar
- Vitamin supplements
- Alcohol
- Coffee (regular and decaf)
- Tea (regular and decaf)
- Milk
- Chocolate
- Vitamin and flavored water
- Energy drinks
- Citrus fruits such as oranges, lemons, grapefruits, pomelos, and limes
- Carbonated fluids or fizzy drinks such as sodas, sparkling water, and beer
- Foods and fluids with caffeine such as coffee, tea, soda, sports drinks, chocolate, and food bars

Your Pelvic Floor Muscles

What Are the Pelvic Floor Muscles?

The pelvic floor is a network of layers of muscle and tissue. The surface muscles form a figure 8 around the openings of the anus and urethra, as well as the vagina in women, to help keep them shut. The deep pelvic muscles form a stretchy floor or hammock, attaching to the bones on each side of the pelvis: the pubic bone at the front, the tailbone (coccyx) at the back, and the sitting bone (ischial tuberosity) on each side. The pelvic floor muscles are normally firm and thick.



What Do the Pelvic Floor Muscles Do?

The pelvic floor muscles do five things. They:

- Support the pelvic organs, the bladder and colon
 - In women, this also includes the uterus and vagina
 - In men, this also includes the prostate
- Are one of the core muscles that help stabilize the pelvis and lower back
- Help stop and start urine flow and passing of gas or stool
- Are involved in sexual function
- Help pump blood back up towards the heart

Relaxing these muscles allows you to urinate or release a bowel movement. They can even stretch to deliver a baby.

Pelvic Floor Problems

Problems can occur when the pelvic floor muscles are too tight or become weak.

Symptoms may include:

- Constipation
- Painful sex
- Urinary or fecal (poop) urgency
- Pelvic pain
- Urinary or fecal (poop) incontinence
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Urinary frequency

The pelvic floor muscles may be weakened by:

- Not keeping the pelvic floor muscles active
- Constipation
- Being overweight
- Being pregnant and having a baby
- Hysterectomy or prostate surgery
- Radiation therapy to the pelvic area
- Heavy lifting
- High-impact exercises
- Chronic cough
- Menopause
- Aging
- Stress or anxiety
- Trauma

Controlling the Urge to Urinate

When you feel a strong urge to urinate:

1. Stop what you are doing and try to stay very still.

- Stand quietly or sit down.
- Avoid rushing to the toilet.

2. Relax.

- Take a deep belly or diaphragmatic breath and let it out slowly.
- Try to distract yourself with positive thoughts of something else.

3. Contract your pelvic floor muscles.

- Squeeze the muscles and let go 5 to 6 times to keep from leaking urine.
- If you feel as though urine will leak when you relax, keep your pelvic floor muscles contracted.
- Contracting your pelvic floor muscles sends a message to your bladder to relax but keep holding urine.

If the urge to urinate returns, repeat the steps above. When you no longer feel the urge to urinate, walk to the bathroom. Do not rush to the toilet.

