

# Fact Sheet: Managing bladder problems

Bladder problems are common, especially as we get older, and they can be distressing. Incontinence affects about 1 in 4 adults in Australia—around 40% of women and 20% of men.

The good news is that symptoms can often be improved, and sometimes resolved, with the right strategies. It takes time and persistence, but the results can benefit quality of life

The tips below may also help if you wake at night to pass urine.

## Keep your bowels regular



- Avoiding constipation is important as this will weaken the pelvic floor and worsen symptoms of bladder and bowel incontinence.
- You should aim to have 1-2 soft bowel motions each day.

Things you can do to achieve this includes:

- Drink at least 2 litres of water a day (unless you are on a fluid restriction).
- Increase fibre (fruit, vegetables, legumes (beans), grains, nuts and seeds).
- Consider fibre supplements such as Benefibre or Metamucil (but it is important to keep drinking lots of fluid, to avoid stool becoming like cement).
- You can speak to your GP or Pharmacist about using stool softeners if dietary fibre isn't enough.
- Aim to open bowels at the same time each day. You can help train your bowels to open regularly by sitting on the toilet for up to 5 minutes at the same time each day
- To aid opening your bowels, ensure you sit with feet elevated to help raise your knees. With a straight back, gently lean forward to rest your forearms upon your knees.

## Avoid bladder irritants



The following are best avoided (or stopped completely) as they can irritate your bladder:

- Caffeinated food and drinks such as coffee, tea, cola and chocolate.
- Teas including black and green tea due to the tannins - try Rooibos as an alternative.
- Fizzy or carbonated drinks including mineral and soda water.

## Lifestyle changes help



- Avoid alcohol (especially in the evening) as this is a bladder irritant and can make you want to pee more.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Stop smoking.
- Keep active with exercise - brisk walking particularly can help keep your bowels regular.

## Helpful toilet habits



- Do not go 'just in case'. Try to go to the toilet only when your bladder is full (going to the toilet just before you go to bed is fine).
- Women should sit down to go to the toilet. Do not hover over the toilet seat. Your feet should touch the ground.
- Take your time. Relax when you are on the toilet. This helps your bladder to empty out fully. If you rush, you may not empty your bladder fully and over time you could get a bladder infection.
- Do not strain when using your bowels. This puts extra load onto your pelvic floor muscles and may weaken the muscles. The pelvic floor muscles help with bladder and bowel control.

## Reduce night-time urination



- Minimise fluid intake from 2pm.
- Elevate your feet for at least an hour in the evenings to help reduce puffy feet (otherwise this fluid returns to the bladder when you lay down and may contribute to night-time bladder problems).
- Consider doing a second wee thirty seconds after the first one before going to bed if you wake often at night to do a wee.

## Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles



A strong pelvic floor is essential to helping improve bladder symptoms! Steps for this are noted below:

### **1) Find the right muscles**

- Imagine you're trying to stop passing urine or stop passing wind.
- The muscles you squeeze are your pelvic floor.

### **2) Get into position**

- Start lying down or sitting comfortably.
- Relax your stomach, thighs, and buttocks.

### **3) Do the squeeze**

- Gently tighten the pelvic floor muscles.
- Lift "up and in," like you're stopping urine.
- Keep breathing normally (don't hold your breath).

### **4) Hold**

- Hold the squeeze for about 3–5 seconds (build up to 10 seconds over time).

### **5) Relax**

- Fully relax the muscles for the same amount of time.

### **6) Repeat**

- Aim for 10 squeezes in a row.
- Do this 3 times a day.

### **Other tips to consider for your exercises:**

- Don't squeeze your butt, thighs, or stomach.
- Don't practise regularly while actually urinating (only use that once to identify the muscles).
- Consistency matters more than strength—do them daily. Like any muscle training, it takes weeks to build them so don't give up too soon!

## Medications



For some people, medications may help.

- Women can speak to their GP about whether topical vaginal oestrogen might help their symptoms.
- For men and women mirabegron (Betmiga) can be effective but may be expensive and can have side effects.
- More affordable options such as oxybutynin (Ditropan) and solifenacin (Vesicare) can be used, but in older people they can cause side effects such as dry mouth, constipation, confusion, and unsteadiness.

## Where to find more assistance



- Talk with your GP or Geriatrician.
- Pelvic health physiotherapists can provide tailored exercises.
- Continence Health Australia: [www.continence.org.au](http://www.continence.org.au)
- National Continence Helpline: 1800 33 00 66 (note, they can advise on how to access government funding to help pay for continence pads)

If you have any questions about this information sheet, please contact your Geriatrician at:

### **Specialist Outpatient Clinics**

The service contact phone is:

**07 3139 4207**

The service contact email is:

**[tpchpatientenquiries@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:tpchpatientenquiries@health.qld.gov.au)**

## **Your questions**

If you are unsure about anything in this fact sheet, please write down questions for your care team.

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