

Healthy bladder habits

What is normal bladder function

It is normal to pass urine between 4-6 times during the day, and less than once at night.

The bladder (which is like a bag of muscle) stretches and fills as urine is produced by the kidneys. As it stretches, it sends information to the brain telling it how full it is. When it reaches a certain volume, a desire to go to the toilet is felt. At an appropriate time (i.e. when sitting on the toilet) the brain tells the bladder muscle to contract and the pelvic floor muscles to relax so that the bladder can empty. The pelvic floor muscles are also important to support the bladder during coughing, sneezing, laughing and physical activity to prevent bladder/urinary leakage.

Bladder leakage

Involuntary leakage from your bladder during coughing, sneezing, exercising or laughing (called stress urinary incontinence) or when you don't make it to the toilet in time (urge urinary incontinence), can be very distressing and embarrassing. It can lead people to withdraw from many aspects of their life including exercise, social engagements, holidays or even playing with children and grandchildren.

Physiotherapy for bladder leakage

Pelvic Health physiotherapy plays a key role in the assessment and management of bladder leakage including:

- Diagnosing the type of incontinence you have
- Determining any risk factors that may be contributing to bladder or bowel leakage
- Advice regarding lifestyle changes including avoiding constipation, losing weight, stopping smoking
- Detailed assessment of pelvic floor muscles (including how to contract them correctly) and creation of an individualised pelvic floor program
- Optimising fluid intake and promoting healthy bladder and bowel habits
- Identifying and managing any contributing issues
- Providing advice regarding appropriate forms of general exercise including any necessary modifications to your current exercise program
- Advice regarding starting any new exercise program
- Correct "core" muscle strengthening
- Fitting of continence support devices

Stress Urinary Incontinence: pelvic floor muscles help support the bladder when you cough, sneeze, or perform any activity that puts pressure on the bladder.

Urgency or urge incontinence, pelvic floor muscles help support the bladder and allow you to get to the toilet on time. Pelvic health physiotherapy for bladder urgency and urge leakage may also include:

- Bladder calming strategies
- Bladder training
- Dry needling
- Instruction of the use of portable TENS machines

Normal bladder habits

- Going to the toilet 4-6 times a day (or every 3-4 hours) and no more than once per night
- First desire to go when the bladder is holding approximately 200 – 250mls
- Having enough warning and time to find a toilet once the bladder feels full
- Completely emptying at each toilet visit, without straining or rushing
- No leakage
- No pain with either filling or emptying
- Maximum capacity of 400 – 550mls

You can help your bladder to behave normally by following these guidelines.

Healthy Bladder habits:

- Aim to drink between 1.5 – 2 litres of fluid per day – our bladders prefer this to be mainly water
- Minimise fluid intake in the 2-3 hours before bed
- Reduce irritant intake – caffeine, alcohol and artificial sweeteners can all irritate the bladder and cause urgency and leakage
 - Carbonated drinks, citrus juice and spicy foods can also do this to a lesser degree
- Listen to your bladder and go with a good urge, not 'just in case' – the bladder works best when it is allowed to fill and empty normally
- Sit, don't hover – hovering can stop the bladder from emptying completely. You cannot catch germs from a public toilet seat, but placing toilet paper or using a disinfectant spray may make you more comfortable.
- Take your time, don't rush!
- Always go to the toilet before just before bedtime
- Practice good bowel habits (see below)
 - Avoid constipation and straining which can irritate the bladder and weaken the pelvic floor
- Exercise and maintain healthy body weight
- Stop smoking – nicotine can irritate the bladder causing urgency; smoking is one of the leading causes of bladder cancer

At The Pelvic Health Clinic we believe in individualised and holistic treatment. We aim to work closely with you to determine the best management plan for you and your life, and to empower you to reach your health goals.

Bowels

What are normal bowel habits?

Normal bowel emptying occurs between three times a day and three times a week. You should be able to hold on for a short time after you first feel the urge to empty your bowels so that you have time to get to the toilet. Your stool (poo) should be well-formed and soft.

It is normal to be able to empty your bowels within 3-4 minutes of sitting down without straining or pain, and you should feel fully emptied when you finish.

Common bowel conditions

- Constipation – opening bowels less than three times per week, regularly having hard stools, straining to start or complete bowel motion, or feeling incompletely empty
- Urgency – having to rush to the toilet for bowel motion. If you don't make it in time and have an accident, this is referred to as urge faecal incontinence
- Faecal incontinence - loss of bowel control resulting in leakage from the bowel or a bowel accident. Loss of control can refer to gas, liquid or solid wastes (stool).

Good bowel habits

To maintain soft and regular bowel motions:

1. Drink at least 1.5-2 litres of fluids (preferably water) each day.
2. Eat plenty of high fibre foods (including balance of soluble and insoluble fibre) and have a balance of 'wet' (fruits, veggies) and 'dry' (pasta, bread) foods
 - *Soluble fibre* – found in the soft insides of plants (eg. Oats, barley, psyllium, berries, fruit seeds). **Soluble fibre** helps to slow the emptying process in our stomachs, which helps you feel fuller
 - *Insoluble fibre*- found in the skeleton of plants (eg. Bran, wheat-based food, cauliflower, cabbage, fruit skins, nuts, legumes. Insoluble fiber draws water into your stool, making it softer and easier to pass. It also helps to bulk up your stool to speed up movement through gut.
3. Get sufficient gentle exercise, such as walking, to overcome the effects of slowed bowel activity after surgery.
4. On the toilet, sit leaning forward and allow your tummy to bulge and relax (see below)
5. Listen to your urges to use your bowels. Take your time when emptying your bowels and go withing 10 minutes of getting to urge to go.

Emptying the Bowels

Learning the right way to empty the bowel without straining is important.

Sitting correctly on the toilet:

- Lean forwards and rest elbows on knees, keeping spine straight
- Legs wide apart – toes down, heels up
- Knees should be higher than hips - if legs are shorter use a foot stool
- Bulge the abdomen out gently so it is soft – this will help the deep sphincters to release and opens to funnel
- Make the waist wide (say 'sss') with each urge
- Make sure the upper tummy doesn't tighten up
- Keep your lips open and your teeth apart, breathe out
- Pull up your muscles around the back passage when you have finished emptying

Good Toilet Position





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