

# **Bladder control for older adults**

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## **What is incontinence?**

Incontinence is a problem with leaking urine. You leak urine if you do not have control of your bladder. It is a common problem in older people. Leaking urine can be very upsetting.

Reading this handout will help you learn more about incontinence.

## **Can being in hospital affect bladder control?**

You may notice that your bladder control is not as good as it was before your hospital stay. There could be many reasons for this, but do not worry -- there are ways to help.

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## Some reasons for loss of bladder control

- The bladder holds urine. Your bladder may not empty properly. A simple test, using a scanner, can see if you have any urine left after you go to the bathroom and empty your bladder. The test is done at your bedside in your hospital room.
- If your urine is dark in colour, it could mean you are not drinking enough. You could be dehydrated. Dehydrated means that you do not have enough fluid in your body. Drink plenty of fluids. This will help prevent strong urine from irritating your bladder. When your bladder is irritated it can leak urine.
- Your stools may be hard and small. You may be constipated. Constipation can affect bladder control. Tell your nurse or doctor so you can be treated with diet, fluids and medication if needed to soften your stools.
- You might go to the toilet often, but only pass small amounts of urine each time. If so, you may have a urinary tract infection, or be getting one. If you have a urinary tract infection you may:
  - need to go all of a sudden
  - need to go all the time
  - feel burning when you go
  - leak urine

Tell your nurse or doctor. You may need a urine test to see if you have an infection.

In men an enlarged prostate is a common cause of needing to go to the bathroom to empty your bladder all the time or leaking urine.

- If you have a catheter in your bladder, ask your nurse or doctor how long it has to stay in.
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## What can I do to improve bladder control?

### Make it easier to get to the bathroom on time

- Use a commode at your bedside if it is hard to get to the bathroom. A commode is a toilet that looks like a chair. In the bathroom, use a raised toilet seat with arms or a handrail.
- Wear clothes that are easy to remove.
- Always wear slippers with non-slip soles. Make a safe path to the bathroom. Get rid of clutter and stuff on the path to the bathroom.
- Put your feet up. This will help move the fluid that collects in your legs or feet. It will help reduce trips to the bathroom at night.

### Empty your bladder

- Train your bladder to empty regularly. Begin with every 2 to 3 hours. Gradually increase the time between going to the bathroom to get to this.
- Empty your bladder well every time you go. It sometimes helps if you change your position by leaning forward or backward. Gently, press on your lower tummy to force extra fluid out.

### Drink plenty of fluids

- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluids like water, decaffeinated drinks, apple, grape or cranberry juice. Citrus fruit juices can irritate the bladder. Avoid caffeine which increases the urge to go. Limit alcohol and carbonated drinks.

## **Bladder exercises for men and women**

- There are muscles in your pelvic or hip area that hold and support the bladder, uterus (womb) and bowel. These muscles can be weakened by childbirth, surgery, injury, hormone changes, or other changes as you age.
- You can do exercises to strengthen these muscles. You can do these exercises while sitting, lying, or standing. They are called pelvic floor muscle exercises:
  1. Tighten your bottom as if you are trying to prevent passing gas.
  2. Hold for at least 3 to 5 seconds.
  3. Relax for 3 to 5 seconds.
  4. Repeat 10 of these exercises 4 to 5 times a day.

## **Watch your medications**

- Water pills (diuretics) can cause you to go to the toilet more often.
- Sedatives, tranquilizers, or muscle relaxants can make you less aware of having to go.

**If you still have problems, talk with your doctor or nurse about seeing a specialist in incontinence.**