

Where to go for further help

If in doubt or concerned, please speak to your GP who will do some basic checks and possibly refer you to a health care professional (such as a community nurse, bladder and bowel nurse specialist or physiotherapist) for assessment and treatment.

Useful web addresses

NHS inform:

www.nhsinform.scot

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy:

www.csp.org.uk/your-health/conditions/incontinence

The Bladder and Bowel Foundation:

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

The Squeezy app:

www.squeezyapp.co.uk

Telephone

**National Confidential Bladder and Bowel UK
Helpline Telephone 0161 607 8219**

NHS inform 0800 22 44 88

Funding for this leaflet was kindly provided by the Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation, an operating name of the Lothian Health Board Endowment Fund, Scottish Charity Number SC007342

Edinburgh & Lothians
Health Foundation



Help Yourself to Have a Healthy Bladder and Bowel



This leaflet provides information for
adults on self help strategies for some
bladder and bowel problems



Many people of all ages and gender suffer from bladder and bowel problems but do not discuss them with anyone. They may feel embarrassed or think that little can be done to help them.

Most bladder and bowel problems can be improved or cured by following the simple lifestyle advice in this leaflet and seeking help if they do not improve.

The Bladder

The bladder stores urine which is a waste product produced by the kidneys. Around 1 - 1.5 litres of urine is produced each day.

What is normal bladder habit?

Emptying urine from your bladder daily around four to six times and during the night not more than once. This varies from person to person. A number of factors can cause changes to this pattern.

Common bladder problems include:

- **Urinary incontinence** - leakage of urine which you are unable to control
- **Overactive bladder** - you need to empty the bladder urgently which is difficult to ignore
- **Incomplete bladder emptying** - feeling that you have not emptied your bladder completely.

These symptoms are often affected by lifestyle and on their own may not necessarily be a sign of disease.

The Bowel

The bowel works by digesting food and absorbing nutrients into the blood stream. It then empties the waste that the body cannot use.

What is a normal bowel habit?

Emptying your bowel from three times a week to three times daily. Bowel movements should be soft, formed and easy to pass without straining. A normal pattern varies from person to person.

Common bowel problems include:

- **Constipation** - hard bowel movements passed less frequently than normal
- **Diarrhoea** - watery or very loose bowel movements passed frequently
- **Urgency** - sudden need to empty your bowels and reach the toilet on time
- **Bowel (faecal) incontinence** - the inability to control your bowel movements.

7 tips for a healthy bladder and bowel

1. Drink well

- **Try to limit fluid intake to around six to eight glasses of fluids** (1½ to 2 litres) daily spread throughout the day, unless advised by the doctor
- **High fluid intake** will increase the number of times you need to pass urine
- **Low fluid intake** can cause bladder irritation, urine infections and constipation
- **Fluids before bedtime** - avoid drinking fluids two to three hours before you go to bed if you wake up frequently to empty your bladder during the night
- **Avoid drinks that irritate the bladder** such as alcohol and take more of the drinks that do not irritate the bladder as shown in diagram below.



2. Eat healthily

- **A balanced diet** includes whole grains (for example potatoes, rice, pasta) and at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- **Eat regular meals** (especially breakfast) as skipping meals can lead to an irregular bowel habit.

Please refer to the Eatwell Guide at:

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx

3. Do your pelvic floor exercises

The “**pelvic floor**” is the group of muscles that play a vital role in supporting and controlling the bladder and bowel in both men and women. When not exercised, the pelvic floor muscles weaken through lack of use causing loss of bladder and bowel control. **If you don't use it, you lose it.**

Regular pelvic floor exercise is important to strengthen the pelvic muscles.



- Sit on a firm chair or lie on your back on the bed or the floor with knees bent and slightly apart. Rest your feet on the bed or floor
- Tighten the muscles around your back passage as if you are trying to stop or slow the passage of wind. At the same time, tighten the muscles at the front passage as if you are trying to stop or slow the passage of urine. You should feel a squeeze and a lift inside. Try to hold this squeeze and lift for as long as you can up to a count of 10. Let the muscles rest for four seconds and then repeat. Repeat the contraction as many times as you can up to 10 times.

Don't forget to breathe!

- Do the same exercise but squeeze and lift quickly and let go immediately. This will help your muscles to react quickly when you cough, sneeze, laugh, etc. Do as many as you can up to 10.

Try to fit into your daily activities three to five times daily. It may take a few weeks for you to start seeing results. You'll have the most benefit if you continue to do these exercises regularly for the rest of your life.

4. Healthy weight

- **Excess weight** may make bladder and bowel symptoms worse by putting additional strain on your pelvic floor muscles
- **Weight loss and regular exercise** (such as walking, cycling and swimming) can improve bladder and bowel symptoms as well as your general health.

For more information about healthy weight, please refer to the NHS Choices height/weight chart available at:

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/loseweight/Pages/height-weight-chart.aspx



5. Do not smoke

- **Nicotine** is a stimulant in cigarettes that may irritate your bladder and bowels causing you go to the toilet frequently
- **Smoking** can cause coughing which puts a strain on pelvic floor muscles and worsen incontinence
- **Bladder and bowel cancer** risk is increased by smoking.

6. Avoid constipation

- **Constipation** can worsen bladder symptoms and weaken pelvic floor muscles by straining
- **Sit correctly on the toilet when emptying your bowels** by leaning forwards with your elbows on your knees and putting your feet on a foot stool
- **Go to the toilet when you have the sensation to open your bowels** and stay on the toilet until you have completely finished
- **Having a healthy diet, keeping active** and having an **adequate fluid** intake will help.



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7. Maintain good bladder and bowel habits

- **Reduce urgency** by avoiding the habit of going to the toilet “just in case” so the bladder can learn to hold larger volumes of urine
- **Avoid the risk of urine infections** by taking your time when passing urine to ensure your bladder has emptied completely. Females should always wipe themselves from front to back after passing urine.

Acknowledgements and references

This leaflet has been developed in collaboration with NHS Lothian Communications (Public Involvement Service), NHS Lothian Health Promotion, NHS Lothian Medical Illustrations and citizens from VOCAL Carers Support Group.

- NHS Lothian (2016) *Bladder Care: How to keep your bladder healthy*. Patient information leaflet.
- *Toilet matters: Information for people who have difficulty controlling their bladder*. Project Patient information leaflet.

Interpretation and Translation

You can access this document on tape, in Braille, large print, audio formats and various computer formats if you ask us. Please, kindly contact: Interpretation and Translation Service (ITS) on 0131 242 8181 and quote reference number 17-1329. ITS can also give information in your community language (e.g. Polish and Arabic). Resource leaflet created by NHS Lothian 'Promoting Continence in Lothian Project Team'. E-mail: Promoting.continence@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk