



# A healthy bladder

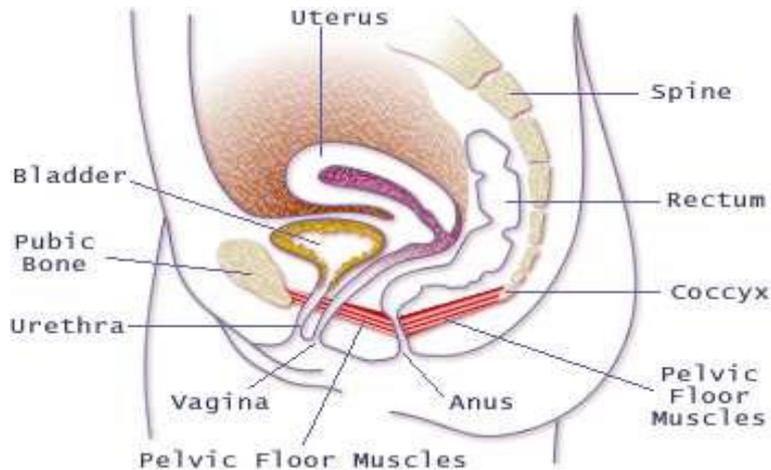
## A patient's guide

### How your bladder works

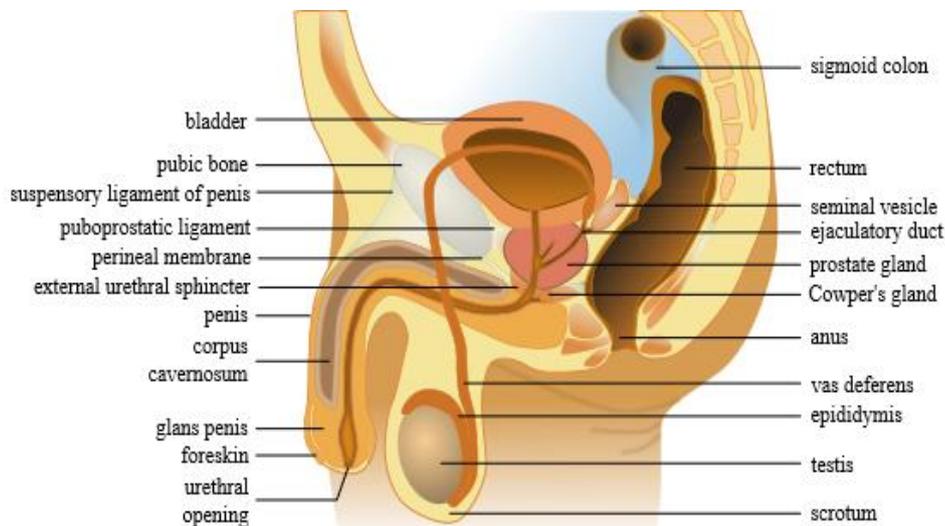
Urine is collected and stored in the bladder. The bladder is a muscular organ positioned in the pelvis just behind the pubic bone. In between visits to the toilet the bladder relaxes and fills up. When you go to the toilet the bladder squeezes and urine comes out through a tube called the urethra.

A normal bladder can hold between 400ml and 600ml of urine. On average, people empty their bladder four to seven times per day.

### FEMALE



### MALE



## What can go wrong with the bladder?

Despite being so common, bladder difficulties are often hidden. The good news is that a lot can be done to manage, improve and sometimes cure these conditions.

### **Stress incontinence**

Some people leak urine when they cough, sneeze, laugh, run, jump, make sudden movements or walk. This is called stress incontinence.

This usually happens because the muscles of the pelvic floor or urethral sphincter are weak or damaged. ([Hyperlink to Pelvic Floor Exercises Leaflets](#))

### **Overactive Bladder Syndrome (OAB)**

This is often referred to as an overactive bladder. This problem is caused when the bladder muscle squeezes even when you want to hold on.

Symptoms include:

- A sudden need to pass urine
- Leaking before you are able to reach a toilet
- Going to the toilet frequently
- Having to wake up at least once a night to pass urine

([Hyperlink to Over Active Bladder Leaflet](#))

### **Mixed incontinence**

It is not unusual to have stress incontinence and OAB at the same time. This is called 'mixed symptoms'. ([Hyperlink to Leaflets](#))

### **Problems in emptying**

Sometimes the bladder doesn't empty properly. Some people experience overflow incontinence which may mean urine dribbles all of the time. This requires medical assessment and treatment. Please consult your GP

### **Bladder infections/urinary tract infection (UTI)**

A bladder infection or UTI is most commonly caused by bacteria from outside of the body travelling up the urethra and into your bladder.

Symptoms include:

- increased need to go to toilet
- dark, cloudy and smelly urine
- burning feeling or pain when passing urine
- a sensation of incomplete bladder emptying
- pain in lower abdomen

This requires immediate medical assessment and treatment so please visit your GP for a urine test. If you have blood in your urine you need an urgent GP appointment as there could be a serious underlying cause.

### **Nocturia**

Nocturia is when you get up frequently to go to the toilet during the night time. Although frequency can increase up to twice a night with age, it may be due to infection, overactive bladder or fluid retention in the daytime. This may need further assessment so please consult your GP.



## Smoking

Smoking is associated with incontinence and Over Active Bladder. Smoking is also the leading risk factor for bladder cancer and is thought to be responsible for 50 per cent of all cases. It's never too late to stop smoking! If you wish help quitting please contact your GP or ask to be referred to the hospital smoking cessation service.

## What can you do?

### Pelvic floor exercises

Doing exercises to strengthen the pelvic floor muscle can treat incontinence. Ask for The Whittington Health leaflet Understanding pelvic floor muscle exercises.

**(Hyperlink to Pelvic Floor Exercises Leaflets)**

### Fluid intake

Try to drink between 1.5 - 2 litres of fluid per day.

Do not try to reduce your fluid intake, this will concentrate your urine which could irritate of your bladder, can increase risk of constipation and can also lead to urinary infections and urinary stone formation.

Some fluids are bladder irritants and may make your symptoms worse. It might help your bladder to reduce your intake of these types of fluids such as:

- Caffeine (tea, green tea, coffee, cola drinks)
- Carbonated drinks (fizzy)
- Citrus juices
- Alcohol

You could replace them with non-caffeinated fluids such as:

- Diluted fruit squash
- Herbal tea (fruit, rooibos, flower, ginger, etc.)
- Decaffeinated tea/coffee
- Soup

You may also wish to cut down on spicy or caffeinated foods as they may irritate the bladder.

### Bladder retraining

Try bladder retraining if you find that you are going to the toilet too often, passing only small amounts of urine and you are certain that you don't have an infection.

- Start by trying to hang on for an extra five minutes each time you want to go, although this will be uncomfortable.
- When you have adjusted to this extra five minutes (this might take days, weeks or months), and it no longer distresses you, try ten minutes and so on.
- At first you may leak urine more than normal as you are taking longer to get to the toilet, but you will find yourself leaking less within a few weeks.
- Wear a continence pad if you need to make yourself feel more secure, and less worried about being embarrassed.
- When you are hanging on, try to distract yourself. Don't think about your bladder as it will make the urgency worse:

- Keep busy
- Make a shopping list
- Count backwards



- Sit on a hard chair
- Curl your toes and squeeze your buttocks
- Stay calm - don't get upset
- Tell your bladder that YOU are in charge, and not the other way around!

Aim to hold your bladder for two to four hours. Don't hold on for more than four hours.

### **Preventing urine infections**

Washing the genital area once a day with water is adequate to prevent urine infections. Soap, bubble bath, vaginal douches and shower gel will disrupt the skin's natural defences. Use aqueous cream instead of soap once a day to wash only the external genital area, as this is gentle enough not to irritate the skin. You can buy this cheaply from chemists.

Other tips that may help to prevent urine infections include:

- Avoid tight, particularly thong-style, underwear
- When wiping the genital area after using the toilet, always wipe from front to back.
- Empty your bladder after sexual intercourse.
- Cranberry may be useful to prevent urine infections. Check with your GP if you are taking blood thinning medication before taking cranberry. You can either take cranberry tablets or drink one cup of 100 per cent cranberry juice a day.

**You can self-refer to our Bladder & Bowel Care Service. Complete the referral form and email to [arti.centralbooking@nhs.net](mailto:arti.centralbooking@nhs.net)**

Bladder & Bowel Care Service  
River Place Health Centre  
Essex Road  
London N1 2DE

Telephone: 020 3316 8401

Open Monday – Friday 09:00 – 17:00

### **Organisations that can help**

#### **Bladder and Bowel Community (formerly bladder& bowel foundation)**

The Bladder and Bowel Community (B&BC) is the UK wide service for people with bladder and bowel control problems. B&BC provides information and support services, including a confidential helpline.

Bladder & Bowel Community  
7 the Court  
Holywell Business Park  
Northfield Road  
Southam  
CV47 0FS  
General Enquiries: 01926 357220  
Email: [help@bladderandbowel.org](mailto:help@bladderandbowel.org)  
Medical Helpline: 0800 031 5412



**Bladder Health UK (Formerly The Cystitis Overactive Bladder Foundation)**

Bladder Health UK gives support to people with all forms of cystitis, overactive bladder and continence issues together with their families and friends. We are the largest bladder patient support charity in the UK. We have a busy chat room/Forum, a widely used website and active Twitter and Facebook accounts for those bladder illness sufferers seeking information, help and support.

Confidential Advice Line: 0121 702 0820.

Web Site – [info@bladderhealth.org](mailto:info@bladderhealth.org)

**Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)**

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or [whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net)

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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