

***Things to know and things you can do, to make your bladder problem better.***

**1. Avoid bladder irritants.** There are some foods and liquids that may irritate the bladder. These cause you to feel the urge to urinate and to go more often.

This list is long; start by cutting out the first three which are the worst, and see how you do. If still having irritated, frequent, urgent urination, cut out the whole list.

Avoid :

1. -Alcoholic beverages: liquor, wine, beer
2. -Caffeine: coffee, tea, dark sodas, darker herbal teas, chocolate
3. -Very acidic fruit or fruit juices: orange, grapefruit, lemon, lime, mango, pineapple.
4. -Tomatoes: tomato juice, red spaghetti sauce, pizza, barbecue sauce, chili
5. -spicy foods: Mexican, Thai, Indian, Cajun
6. -sugar: corn sweeteners, honey, fructose, sucrose, lactose
7. -artificial sweeteners: Equal, Nutrasweet
8. -high doses of vitamins
9. -carbonated beverages

Grape juice, cranberry juice, cherry juice and apple juice usually don't irritate the bladder. **The best beverage is water.**

**2. Drink 4-6 oz (small cup) every 3-4 hours** evenly spaced throughout the day. Limit your total fluid intake to 48-64 oz per day (@6-8 8 oz cups). Remember that ALL liquids are fluids- this includes ice cream, yogurt, jello, milk shakes, and soups. The goal is pale yellow urine that does not have a strong odor. Sometimes women try to cut down their fluid to avoid leakage. The problem with this is that very dark, concentrated urine also irritates the bladder, making you have to go more often. Never drink less than 48 oz a day (6 cups).

**3. Urinate by the clock- every 2-3 hours.** Don't wait until you feel full, or for a more convenient time. This teaches the bladder to wait for the next urination instead of getting irritated too soon. Try to relax as much as possible when voiding. Do not strain or bear down to start a stream or empty your bladder more quickly. Bearing down, over time, makes urine problems worse. Allow the stream to start and flow naturally as a result of a bladder contraction.

Wear clothes that are easy to get off when it is time to use the toilet. If you have trouble using your fingers for buttoning or zippering, try pants with an elastic waist or Velcro closures. Tight clothing may be irritating and hard to manage.

**4. Preventing leakage immediately after voiding.** Sometimes a small amount of urine pools in the lower vagina after emptying the bladder. If this happens, one may experience leakage when arising from the toilet or when moving for several minutes after emptying the bladder. This is called **Intravaginal pooling**. The urethral opening (where urine exits the body) is very close to the vaginal opening, and as we age, the urethra often move into the lower part of the vagina. The position may change after surgery or childbirth. To determine whether this is happening, use toilet tissue to wipe into the lower vaginal area after voiding. Press the tissue into the vagina opening and strain GENTLY to see if any fluid is wicked onto the tissue. OR, use the fingers to separate your labial lips apart, and lean

forward, after each urination, to prevent urine from pooling in the vagina and causing a constant dribble.

#### **5. Reducing nighttime awakenings to empty your bladder**

- Limit fluid intake after dinner to reduce night time urination.
- Avoid swelling in your lower legs by wearing support hose or elevating your legs when resting during the day.
- If you have trouble getting around, then make the toilet facilities convenient. A bedside commode may be an option.
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#### **6. Establish regular bowel habits-**

Constipation affects bladder control. A diet full of fiber and the right amount of fluids help to produce a soft, well-lubricated stool that is easy to pass. Often this isn't enough. Dietary fiber supplements (methylcellulose prevents gas and bloating) and daily Miralax are options to help keeps bowel regular and easy. .

#### **7. Watch your weight.** Obesity makes bladder control more difficult.

**8. If you smoke, here is one more reason to consider a quit plan.** Smoking make leakage worse because of:

- (1) chronic cough, damaging the urethra and vaginal support tissues,
- (2) bladder irritation caused by nicotine,
- (3) quality of collagen (tissue) support is weakened.

If surgery has been recommended as treatment for your incontinence and/or prolapse please remember that these surgical repairs do not hold up as long in people who smoke.

**9. Don't irritate your vulva area.** Avoid colored and perfumed toilet tissue and sanitary napkins. Do not use detergent bath additives. These can irritate the skin around the bladder opening and make you worse. Dove unscented is the least irritating soap for your vulva (female genital area). Rinse well, pat dry, and even blow dry with your hair dryer on COOL setting. All-cotton underwear, or small urine-loss pads, are less irritating than menstrual pads or nylon underwear.

#### **10. Begin to do Pelvic Muscle Exercises (Kegels)** regularly to strengthen the pelvic muscles.

##### **KEGEL EXERCISES**

These are exercises to strengthen the support under your bladder and vagina. Having a strong support there will decrease the chance of urine leaking, and of relaxation of the vagina. Sexual pleasure can be increased when the muscles are strong.

1. To find the muscle, pretend you are trying to hold back the passage of gas. Or, while urinating, try to slow or stop the flow of urine. Both methods will help you find your pelvic floor muscles. Now, we want to get them stronger...
2. Like any muscle, these muscles respond to exercise. If you do daily bicep curls, you get stronger, larger, thicker bicep muscles. It's the same with the pelvic floor muscles, and if they are strong and thick, they help support your bladder better.

3. Try squeezing the muscles, pulling your vagina inward. Do both quick, hard squeezes and long, slow, holding squeezes. Both are useful.
4. Start with just a few squeezes, as your muscle may be weak, and tire easily. As you do more you'll be able to hold longer and squeeze harder for more repetitions.
5. Associate your exercise with regular activity, to help you remember. For instance: do 10 or 20 sets at each red light while driving; or before you get up from a meal; or while on telephone HOLD; or in the shower; or while tooth brushing; etc.

Make it a regular thing.

6. Increase your repetitions, the strength of the quick squeezes, and the length of time on the long holds. All of this will help your muscle get better. You should end up doing at least 3 sets a day, of 20 repetitions or more, within a few months.

**Relax and rest the muscles after each exercise.**

7. Use it! If urine leakage is a problem for you, deliberately tighten the muscle before cough, sneeze, standing up, or whatever makes you leak. Squeeze hard and long, and you'll leak much less.
8. Continue to practice and exercise every day. You may see immediate results, or you may need to continue for 6 - 12 weeks before you do. But, nearly every woman is helped by this program.

Helpful hints:

- Always tighten the pelvic muscles before you lift, cough, or sneeze to help hold back the flow of urine. Remember, learn to squeeze before you sneeze.
- Make a habit of tightening the muscles before you clear your throat or blow your nose.

**URGENCY OF URINATION:** -You can also use pelvic muscle exercises to help suppress a strong urge to urinate when it comes on.

This is called **"freeze and squeeze"**

Steps for this:

1. Instead of rushing to the bathroom when the urge strikes you, STOP and hold still
  2. Kegel and kegel and kegel again. Hold as long and hard as you can.
  3. This usually makes the urge get better for a short time
  4. So, once the urge gets better, WALK, don't run, to the bathroom to urinate. Hopefully you will be dry.
  5. If the urge goes away as you kegel, and you DON'T go to the bathroom: Next time it comes back it will be much stronger. So, do be sure to go after you get the urge to go away the first time.
- If you are unsure about how to do Kegels, ask us to review this with you.

**11. Helpful books:**

"Staying Dry" by Kathryne Burgio has many helpful suggestions  
"Women's Waterworks" by Pauline Chiarelli  
"Seven Steps to Normal Bladder Control" by Elizabeth Vierck.

**12. The National Association for Continence (NAFC)** has a wealth of very helpful information for individuals with a wide variety of bladder difficulties. For more information about this subject, write to NAFC, PO Box 8310, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 29305-8310, or call 1-800-BLADDER. Their Web site is <http://www.nafc.org>

**13. For more information on the Internet**

**Voices for Pelvic Floor Disorders --[www.VoicesForPFD.org](http://www.VoicesForPFD.org)**

Developed by the American Urogynecologic Society

**Website for Overactive Bladder. [www.OABCentral.org](http://www.OABCentral.org)**

***Good bladder habits can be developed at any time. Old habits may be hard to break especially when we try to change too many things at once. Start slowly, changing one thing at a time until you become comfortable with your new healthy habits.***

**GOOD LUCK!**