

## Patient Guide Controlling Your Bladder Symptoms

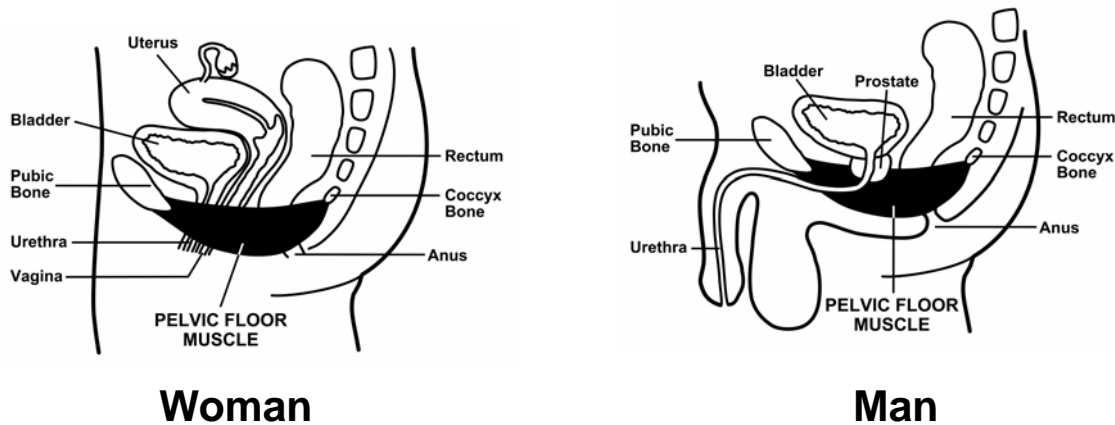
Common bladder symptoms include:

- urinary incontinence – accidental leakage of urine
- urinary urgency - sudden and strong sensation to urinate immediately
- frequency – urinating often, usually more than 8 times in a day

Special exercises and medications can help lessen common bladder symptoms. In addition, many people find that specific diet and lifestyle changes may help reduce bladder problems.

### Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Bladder control depends on muscles working together when the bladder is filling: the bladder muscle should be relaxed and the muscles (called the pelvic floor muscle) around the urethra (the tube that urine passes through) should be tight. See where the pelvic floor muscle is located in these pictures.



Exercises that strengthen the pelvic floor muscles can help hold urine inside the bladder, preventing urine from leaking out. These exercises are commonly called “Kegel” exercises, named after the doctor who developed them. To perform a pelvic floor muscle exercise, imagine that you are trying to control the passing of gas or pinching off a stool. Or imagine you are in an elevator full of people and you feel the urge to pass gas. What do you do? You squeeze or pull in the ring of muscle around your rectum - your pelvic floor muscle. Women will feel a pulling-in sensation in the area around the vagina or pulling in of the rectum. Men may see their penis lift or a pulling in of the rectum. One exercise consist of both “squeezing and relaxing” the muscle. Start by squeezing the muscle for 5 seconds and build till you can hold the squeezing or 10 seconds. Be sure to relax completely between each muscle tightening.

### Bladder retraining

Bladder control can be improved by scheduling bathroom trips. The schedule is changed over a period of weeks or months to slowly increase the time between trips. For example, a person who normally goes to the bathroom every hour could plan to go every hour and 15 minutes. After maintaining the new schedule for a few days, the time could be increased to every hour and 30 minutes. The goal is to void no more than every 3 to 4 hours. If you get the **urge** to void and it is not yet your scheduled voiding time; stop all

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activity and sit down if possible. Then try one of these techniques to help you lessen the urge, which will cause the bladder to relax, and give you more time to get to the bathroom:

- Take some slow, deep breaths through your mouth, concentrating on your breathing; or concentrate on an activity, such as taking a vacation, visiting a friend, counting backwards from 100, or reciting the words of a favorite song or nursery rhyme.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscle quickly several times in a row.

### **Check your diet and medications**

Certain food and beverages can irritate the bladder and make symptoms worse. These include alcoholic beverages, caffeinated foods and/or carbonated beverages, (soft drinks, coffee or tea, chocolate), tomato-based products, citrus fruits and juices, spicy foods, and artificial sweeteners (e.g. Equal). Also some over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs contain caffeine which can worsen bladder problems such as Excedrin, Midol, Anacin, Dristan and Sinarest. Do not stop taking prescription drugs without talking to your healthcare provider first.

### **Keep your bowels regular**

Keeping healthy bowel habits may lessen bladder symptoms. Some suggestions include:

1. increase fiber-rich foods in your diet such as beans, pasta, oatmeal, bran cereal, whole wheat bread, fresh fruits and vegetables;
2. exercise to maintain regular bowel movements;
3. drink plenty of nonirritating fluids (water);
4. see your health care provider if you have bowel problems.

### **Maintain a healthy weight**

Being overweight can put pressure on your bladder, which may cause leakage of urine when you laugh or cough. If you are overweight, losing some weight can lessen the pressure on your bladder.

### **Stop smoking**

Cigarette smoking can irritate the bladder muscle. It can also lead to coughing spasms which can cause urinary leakage.