

Patient information

Fluids and your bladder

How your bladder works

Your bladder is found in the lower part of your abdomen (tummy) and acts as a temporary store for your urine. Urine is the waste fluid produced by your kidneys when they clean your blood. The urine travels from the kidneys down into the bladder. The muscles of the bladder allow it to expand, a bit like a balloon. When it becomes full, you get the urge to pass urine. When you pass urine, it leaves the bladder and passes down the urethra (the tube from your bladder to the outside world) into the toilet.

How much should I drink every day?

You should try to drink 1.5 - 2 litres (3 - 4 pints or 6 - 8 cups) of fluid a day. This doesn't have to be just water. It should include everything that you drink: the milk on your cereal, soup etc. You may need to drink more when the weather is hot, or you are doing exercise.

If you do not drink enough fluid, your urine will become strong and concentrated and will irritate your bladder. This will increase the number of times you need to go to the toilet (frequency) and may make you want to rush more (urgency). It may also make you more prone to developing a urine infection. You are also less likely to be constipated if you drink the recommended amount of fluid. This is because water increases the bulk of your stool, making it easier to move through your bowel and pass out of your body.

Bladder problems

- **Incontinence:** Some people experience urinary incontinence (the inability to control when they pass water). There are a number of types of incontinence, but the two most common are:

- **Stress incontinence:** Leakage of urine when you cough, sneeze, laugh or exercise.
- **Urge incontinence:** Where you have a sudden need to pass urine and often leak before you are able to reach the toilet. This can be referred to as an overactive bladder.

If you experience incontinence, you may restrict the amount that you drink to try and reduce your leakage. Unfortunately, reducing the amount that you drink often has the opposite effect. It can mean your urine is strong, concentrated, irritates your bladder and makes you need to go more often and with more urgency. Some people find that certain drinks irritate the bladder and can make their symptoms worse, so reducing these types of drinks can improve symptoms.

- **Urine infections:** A urinary tract infection (UTI) is most commonly caused by bacteria (usually e-coli in women) from outside of the body travelling up the urethra into the bladder. If you have a urine infection, you may notice that your urine is smelly, it may look cloudy and you may feel pain or a discomfort when you pass urine, or just when you finish passing urine. You may also have to go to the toilet more frequently and not feel as though your bladder is emptying fully.

Drinking the recommended amount of fluid will help prevent bladder irritation and will help to flush out any bacteria when you go to the toilet.

- **Nocturia:** Nocturia is where you get up to the toilet in the night, when your bladder wakes you from sleeping. Getting up once a night is considered normal, however, this increases with age. It is normal to get up two or three times in your seventies!

Drinks which can affect your bladder

Certain drinks can affect your bladder and make you need to go to the toilet more frequently and with more urgency.

- **Caffeinated drinks:** Caffeine is found in tea, coffee, green tea, hot chocolate and some fizzy and energy drinks. It can make the symptoms of frequency and urgency worse because it relaxes muscles in your pelvis and urethra. It can also reduce how long and how deeply you sleep, you may need to wake up more to go to the toilet in the night.

Cutting down the amount of caffeinated drinks you drink, or changing to caffeine free drinks may help to improve your symptoms. If you decide to do this, reduce the amount you drink gradually to avoid withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, drowsiness and irritability. It is important to realise that decaffeinated drinks do still

have some caffeine in them.

Caffeine is also added to painkillers: look out for the words 'extra' or 'plus' as they can denote added caffeine.

- **Fruit juices:** Fruit juices such as orange and grapefruit are acidic and can irritate your bladder and make you want to go more often. They are best avoided if you have regular urine infections, or an overactive bladder. Grapefruit juice interferes with many medications and can cause problems with how the drug is processed. Try and avoid grapefruit if you take statins (such as atorvastatin and simvastatin) or calcium channel blockers (such as nifedipine, amlodipine, verapamil).

It is thought that cranberry juice may help prevent infections by stopping certain bacteria (such as e-coli) from growing and multiplying in your bladder. There is no firm evidence to support this. Try drinking one glass of cranberry juice once or twice a day or cranberry capsules are available if you don't like the juice. **Do not** drink cranberry juice if you are taking warfarin to thin your blood as it interferes with how the drug is processed in the body. Also avoid it if you have diabetes, arthritis, heartburn or a hiatus hernia. It is acidic and may make your symptoms worse.

You could try cranberry capsules if you don't like the taste of cranberry juice.

- **Alcohol:** Alcohol can increase the acidity of your urine and irritate the lining of your bladder. It is also a diuretic so it increases the amount of urine that you produce which will increase the number of times that you need to go to the toilet.
- **Fizzy drinks:** Carbonated drinks, such as cola and lemonade, can cause irritation to the bladder. Artificial and natural sugars can also cause irritation of the bladder. Energy drinks are fizzy and contain caffeine, so are likely to make your symptoms worse.
- **Herbal teas:** Different herbal teas have different properties. Some, such as elderflower, rose, wild blackberry and nettle have a diuretic effect, which may mean that you need to go to the toilet more often.

If you have frequency or urgency, drinking these may make your symptoms worse.

Fluids and your bowel

The type of fluid that you drink can also affect your bowel and how it works:

- Acidic based drinks, such as orange juice, cranberry and lemon as best avoided if you have stomach problems such as irritable bowel syndrome.

- Beer can help to encourage bowel movements.
- Coffee has a laxative effect, so if you have loose stool or diarrhoea, you may want to reduce, or stop drinking coffee. However, if you are constipated, it may help to make your bowel movements more regular.

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