

Improve your bladder control with simple lifestyle changes

To help reduce feelings of urgency, having to go frequently and leaking: try the following tips. If you still have problems, talk to your primary care doctor or call Legacy Medical Group–Urogynecology for an evaluation. Audrey Curtis, M.D., specializes in bladder control problems in women.

Drink less liquid

Unless you exercise heavily or work in hot conditions, you can drink less than eight glasses (64 oz.) of liquid per day and still get the fluids you need. In 2004, the Institute of Medicine reported that most people meet their daily hydration needs by letting their thirst be their guide.

- Drink fluids throughout the day instead of drinking large amounts at one time
- If you have to get up more than two times per night, limit the amount you drink after dinner
- Do not carry a water bottle or large container around with you
- Use a smaller glass or cup
- Take small sips instead of large gulps

Avoid drinks that can irritate your bladder

Some beverages may cause you to make large amounts of urine or aggravate bladder spasms, resulting in a more frequent need to urinate. Common culprits include:

- Caffeine — Eliminate or at least reduce caffeinated beverages like coffee, tea and cola. Eliminate slowly, to avoid a caffeine withdrawal headache.
- Artificial sweeteners — Artificial sweeteners like aspartame or saccharin can irritate the bladder. Diet drinks that contain caffeine can be especially problematic.
- Citrus juices — Although there are no scientific studies to prove this, some people find that citrus juices irritate their bladder.

Establish a schedule

If you leak urine on the way to the bathroom, try going on a regular schedule even when you don't feel like you have to. Sometimes, the message that the bladder is full comes without warning and often too late. Keeping a diary may help you determine when you usually leak and what is a reasonable period of time between trips to the bathroom. Slowly, you may be able to increase the time between trips to the bathroom to three or four hours.

Lose weight

Being overweight puts extra pressure on your bladder. Weight loss will relieve some of that pressure and help you regain bladder control.

Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

Most bladder control problems are caused by weak pelvic muscles — the muscles attached to the bones of the pelvis that support the pelvic organs and help prevent urine leakage. Pregnancy, childbirth and age can all weaken the muscles of the pelvic floor. Exercise can strengthen them and improve bladder control. Identifying the correct muscles to exercise is important. Legacy Health has physical therapists to help you at Legacy Good Samaritan, Legacy Meridian Park and Legacy Salmon Creek Medical Centers.

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