



Health **Ministers** GUIDE

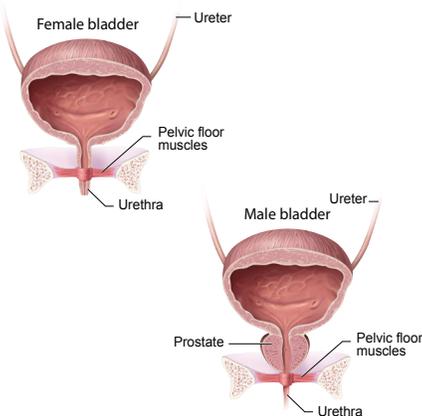
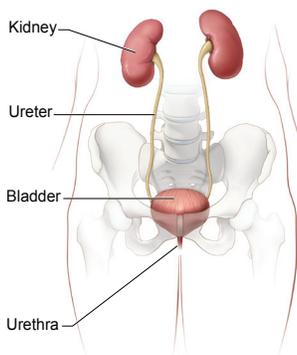
Connecting Science and Community for Health

DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, 25 million Americans experience urinary incontinence. The societal cost of urinary incontinence in Americans over age 65 years is \$26.3 billion.

Bladder cancer is the sixth most common type of cancer in the United States. Nearly 16,000 people die from bladder cancer each year.

THE URINARY SYSTEM



Bladder Health: What Health Ministers Need to Know

Why it's important to talk about bladder health

People rarely talk about bladder health, but everyone is affected by it. Everyone uses their bladder many times each day. But they may not know what to do to keep their bladder healthy. Bladder problems are very common, and they can have a big impact on a person's quality of life (the person's level of health, comfort, and happiness). In fact, people with bladder problems may have a lower quality of life than people with diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure.

Bladder problems can disrupt day-to-day life. When people experience bladder problems, they may avoid social situations, such as faith gatherings, community events, and family get-togethers. Bladder problems can also make it hard to get tasks done at home or at work.

Most Americans will experience a bladder problem at some point in their lifetime. But everyone can take steps to control their bladder health. By sharing the information in this guide, you can help people in your community improve their bladder health.

What is the bladder?

The bladder is a hollow organ, much like a balloon, that stores urine. Pelvic floor muscles help hold urine in the bladder. The bladder is located in the lower abdomen. It is part of the **urinary system**, which also includes the kidneys, ureters, and urethra.

What is urine?

The urinary system makes and stores urine. The body gets nutrients from what we eat and drink. But the body can't use all the materials from foods and drinks. After your body takes what it needs from foods and drinks, it has to get rid of the leftover wastes. The kidneys help remove these wastes and extra water by filtering them out of the blood to make urine. The urine made in the kidneys travels through the ureters to the bladder. The urine is stored in the bladder until you are ready to urinate. When you urinate, the urine exits the body through the urethra.



Each day, the average adult passes about a quart and a half of urine through the bladder and out of the body. A quart and a half of urine would fill four 12 ounce cans of soda. But the exact amount of urine made each day is different for every person. The amount of urine you make changes based on:

- **How much fluid you take in.** This includes fluids from foods as well as drinks.
- **How much fluid you lose by sweating.** You may sweat more when the weather is warmer.
- **How much fluid you lose by breathing.** You may lose more water when you breathe heavily—such as during physical activity.
- **The medicines you take.** Some medicines – such as diuretics (sometimes called “water pills”) – can change the amount of urine you make. Ask your health care professional if your medicines can affect the amount of urine you make.

What affects bladder health?

Many things can affect bladder health. People cannot control everything that affects bladder health. But there are many bladder health behaviors people **can** control. For example, what you eat and drink can impact bladder health. Have you ever noticed a change in the color of your urine after taking a vitamin? Have you ever noticed a change in the smell of your urine after eating asparagus? These common experiences show you how quickly your body uses food and filters waste to make urine.

These are some of the things that can impact bladder health:

- **Aging.** As you get older, the bladder changes. The elastic bladder tissue may toughen and become less stretchy. A less stretchy bladder cannot hold as much urine as before. The bladder wall and pelvic floor muscles may weaken. Weak bladder wall muscles may make it hard to completely empty the bladder. Weak pelvic floor muscles may make it hard to hold urine in the bladder, which may cause urine to leak.
- **Constipation.** Constipation means you are not having bowel movements (or passing stool) as often as you should. Constipation can cause too much stool to build up in the colon. When there is too much stool in the colon, it can put pressure on the bladder and keep it from expanding the way it should.
- **Diabetes.** Diabetes can damage the nerves around the bladder that are important for bladder control.
- **Being overweight.** People who are overweight may be at higher risk for leaking urine.
- **Low physical activity.** Physical activity can help prevent bladder problems, as well as constipation. It can also help keep a healthy weight.
- **Smoking.** Bladder problems are more common among people who smoke. Smoking increases risk for bladder cancer.
- **Alcohol.** For many people, drinking alcohol can make bladder problems worse.
- **Caffeine.** Caffeine can bother the bladder and change how your bladder tells you when you need to urinate.
- **Trauma.** Trauma—such as prostate surgery, childbirth, or sexual assault—can damage the muscles and nerves around the bladder that help control the bladder.

FOOD AND BLADDER PROBLEMS

Some people with bladder problems find that some foods and drinks make the problem worse. People who experience bladder problems may feel better when they don't eat these foods and drinks. It may be helpful for people with bladder problems to try cutting out these foods and drinks for a little while to see if it makes the problem better:

- Sodas
- Artificial sweeteners
- Spicy foods
- Citrus fruits and juices, such as oranges and grapefruits
- Tomato-based foods

COMMON BLADDER PROBLEMS

Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS): a group of symptoms—such as trouble urinating, loss of bladder control, leaking of urine, frequent need to urinate, and pain in the pelvic area (lower stomach). LUTS symptoms can be caused by problems with the bladder or urethra, the muscles that support them, or the nerves that tell them what to do.

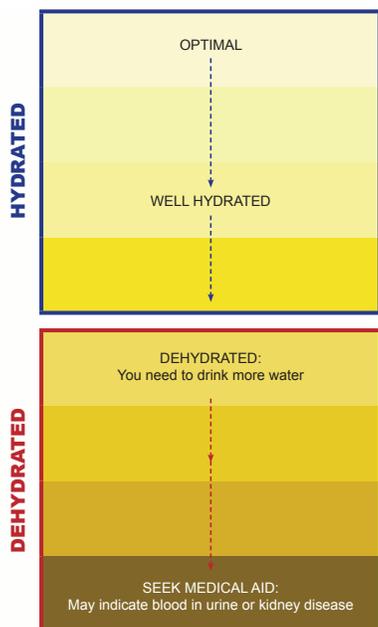
Bladder infection (cystitis): inflammation of the bladder.

Bladder cancer: cancer in the lining of the bladder.

MEN: IS IT YOUR BLADDER OR PROSTATE?

Bladder problems occur more often in women, but they are also quite common in men. But, the reasons for the problems can be different in men and women. Men have a prostate gland. The prostate surrounds the opening of the bladder. While most tissues get smaller with aging, the prostate gets bigger. When it gets too big, it can restrict the flow of urine through the urethra. This can make it hard to start urinating, cause the urine stream to be slow, and prevent men from completely emptying their bladder.

ARE YOU DRINKING ENOUGH FLUID?



*This color chart is not for clinical use.

Full size image available from: <http://usaphcapps.amedd.army.mil/HIOShoppingCart/viewItem.aspx?id=259>

PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE EXERCISES

Pelvic floor muscle exercises (sometimes called Kegel exercises) can help both men and women who leak urine by making the muscles that hold urine in the bladder stronger.

How to do pelvic floor muscle exercises

1. Tighten the pelvic muscles that you use to prevent gas from escaping.
2. Continue tightening the muscles going to the front of the pelvic area.
3. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds before releasing. (If 5 seconds is too long, hold for as long as you can. Over time, try to hold longer.)
4. Repeat 5 to 10 times. (If you can't do 5, start with 1 or 2. Over time, try to do more.)

Also practice contracting and relaxing quickly for 10 seconds. (If 10 seconds is too long, start with less time.) Do this 5 to 10 times. (If you can't do 5 sets, start with fewer sets.)

Try to do the exercises three times a day: in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night. If you can't fit in the exercises three times each day, do as much as you can. Any amount of pelvic floor muscle exercises is better than none.

Check to see if you are doing the pelvic floor muscle exercise correctly. When you are on the toilet, see if you can tighten the pelvic floor muscles to stop the flow of urine.

Steps to keep the bladder healthy

There are steps everyone can take to improve bladder health. Encourage people in your community to take the following bladder health steps:

- **Drink enough fluids** so that the bladder needs to be emptied every 3 to 4 hours. Your urine should be pale yellow if you are drinking enough fluids—see the urine color chart on this page. Most healthy people should try to drink six to eight, 8-ounce glasses of fluid each day. (Some people need to drink less water because of certain conditions, like kidney failure or heart disease. Ask your health care provider how much fluid is healthy for you.) Water is the best fluid for bladder health. At least half of fluid intake should be water.”
- **Limit alcohol and caffeine.** Alcohol and caffeine can make bladder health symptoms worse. Reducing intake of alcohol and caffeinated foods and drinks—such as coffee, tea, chocolate, and most sodas—may improve bladder health.
- **Quit smoking.** If you smoke, take steps to quit. If you don't smoke, don't start.
- **Try not to get constipated.** Eating plenty of high fiber foods (like whole grains, vegetables, and fruits), drinking enough water, and being physically active can help prevent constipation.
- **Keep a healthy weight.** Making healthy food choices and being physically active can help you keep a healthy weight. Make a plan with your health care team to get to or stay at a healthy weight.
- **Do pelvic floor muscle exercises.** Pelvic floor muscles help hold urine in the bladder. Daily exercises can strengthen the pelvic floor muscles to keep them strong. Strong pelvic floor muscles can help keep you from leaking urine when you sneeze, cough, lift, laugh, or have a sudden urge to urinate.
- **Don't hold your urine all day.** Holding urine in your bladder for too long can wear out your bladder muscles. Holding urine may also make a bladder infection more likely.
- **For women, be in a relaxed position while urinating.** Relaxing the muscles around the bladder will make it easier to empty the bladder. Hovering over the toilet seat may make it hard to relax. To allow your muscles to relax, it is best to sit on the toilet seat or in a full crouching squat. Take enough time to fully empty the bladder.

Signs of an unhealthy bladder

Everyone's bladder behaves a little bit differently. But certain signs may mean a bladder problem. Signs of a bladder problem can include:

- Needing to urinate eight or more times in one day, or 24 hours (frequency)
- Waking up many times throughout the night to urinate (nocturia)
- Sudden and urgent need to urinate (urgency)
- Pain or burning before, during, or after urinating
- Cloudy or bloody urine
- Inability to hold urine or leaking urine (urinary incontinence)
- Passing only small amounts of urine after strong urges to urinate
- Trouble starting or having a weak stream while urinating
- Trouble emptying the bladder

What Health Ministers Can Do

- **Start by getting to know the basics of bladder health**, so you can share bladder health knowledge and create bladder friendly environments. This guide is a great place to start.
- **If someone in your community experiences signs of an unhealthy bladder, encourage him/her to speak with a health care professional**, such as a physician or advanced practice nurse. Be aware of the professionals in your community who can diagnose bladder health problems:
 - Primary care professionals, including family practice clinicians, internists, and pediatricians
 - Urologists
 - Gynecologists
- **Let people with bladder problems know they are not alone.** People may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their bladder problem. They may be afraid to talk about it. Sharing bladder health messages in your community may help them understand they are not alone.
- **If a person is diagnosed with a bladder problem, reassure him/her that not all treatments involve medication or surgery.** Acupuncturists and physical therapists can help people manage some of their symptoms.
- **Recognize that bladder health problems can prevent people from attending services or events.** For many older adults, losing bladder control can be the last straw in becoming homebound. Before a community member is homebound, help him/her seek help from a health care professional.
- **Make sure that restrooms are safe, clean, and convenient.** During events or services, make sure seats are conveniently located near restrooms and offer to reserve seats for people who need that assistance.
- **Encourage community members to drink water.** Always provide free, clean water at events. Remember, water from the tap is safe to drink and much cheaper than bottled water. In some cases, tap water may even be cleaner than bottled water.
- **Share messages about bladder health.** Acknowledge the common nature of bladder problems. Talk to community members about signs and symptoms of bladder problems, as well as ways to prevent these problems. You can share messages through regular events and services, health fairs, social media channels, newsletters, and bulletins. Visit the HHS Partnership Center website at hhs.gov/partnerships for more ideas and resources to help you have health conversations in your community. Additional resources are available from the organizations listed in the gray column of this page.
- **Host bladder health support groups** for families and community members for dealing with bladder health problems.
- **Talk to employers and schools in your community about providing access to safe, clean restrooms.** Encourage them to give employees and students bathroom breaks every 3 to 4 hours. Remind them that holding urine can be bad for employee and student health.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Kidney & Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse

Phone: 1-800-891-5390

TTY: 1-866-569-1162

Email: nkudic@info.niddk.nih.gov

Internet: <http://www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov>

- What I need to know about Bladder Control for Women
http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/KUDiseases/pubs/bcw_ez/index.aspx
- Bladder Control: What Men Need to Know
http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/KUDiseases/pubs/bcm_ES/index.aspx
- Bladder Diary
<http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/KUDiseases/pubs/diary/index.aspx>
- Urinary Tract Infections in Adults
<http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/KUDiseases/pubs/utiadult/index.aspx>
- Interstitial Cystitis/Painful Bladder Syndrome
<http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/KUDiseases/pubs/interstitialcystitis/index.aspx>

Urology Care Foundation

Phone: 1-866-RING AUA

(1-866-746-4282)

Internet: <http://www.urologyhealth.org/>

Wesley Theological Seminary Health Minister Resources

www.wesleyhts.org

Women's Health Foundation

Phone: 773-305-8200

Internet: [http://](http://womenshealthfoundation.org/)

womenshealthfoundation.org/

