



**ST. MICHAEL'S
HOSPITAL**
Dún Laoghaire

Pelvic Floor Centre

Taking control of your bladder- getting started



Bladder control

The bladder is one of the pelvic organs and its function is to store urine.

It sits above and behind the pubic bone. The muscular walls of the bladder stretch to hold between 350-500mls.

When the bladder is full, receptors in the bladder wall are activated and the bladder muscles contract, giving a strong urge to urinate.

Many factors can affect the control of the bladder. Common bladder related symptoms are:

- Leakage of urine (incontinence). This can be with rest or activity.
- Increased urgency to pass urine.
- Increased frequency.
- Incomplete emptying
- Urinary tract infections

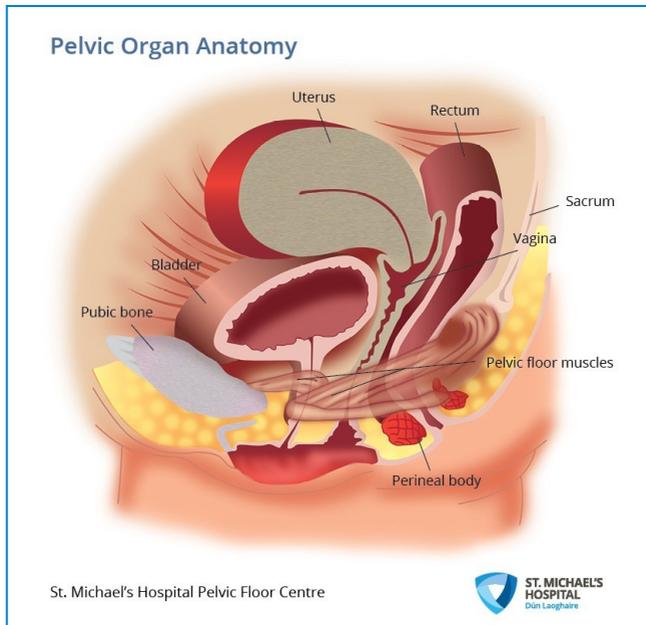
A good place to start to look at your bladder symptoms is to complete a **'Bowel and Bladder diary'** (see leaflets) for 3 days.

This can give a picture of what your daily fluid, food and toileting habits are. Some people restrict their fluid intake due to bladder symptoms.

Drinking enough fluid is important to maintain a healthy bladder and bowel.

It is recommended to drink between 1.5-2 litres of fluid per day, most of this being water.

Based on these volumes, you should empty your bladder approx. 5-8 times/day and once at night.



The following recommendations can help to get you started with better bladder control -

1. Reduce your caffeine intake and other foods/ drinks that can trigger your bladder

Caffeine, alcohol, fizzy drinks, spicy foods, citrus drinks and foods can all be triggers for the bladder.

Be aware and get to know what might have an effect on your bladder urgency.

Caffeine can include coffee, tea, green tea or chocolate.

2. Avoid going to the toilet 'just in case'

Allow the bladder to fill and empty. Depending on fluid intake, initially aim to void every 1.5-2 hours and then increase as able.

3. Drink fluids earlier in your day

If you are up more than once at night with your bladder, avoid drinking fluids approx. 2 hours before bedtime, especially caffeinated drinks or alcohol.

4. Maintain a healthy bodyweight

Excessive weight can put pressure on the pelvic organs, including the bladder, and affect the pelvic floor muscles. Try to keep your BMI <30.

5. Maintain a regular bowel routine

Excessive straining to pass a bowel motion, such as if constipated, can weaken the pelvic floor.

Aim to pass a regular bowel movement without straining. See video and leaflet on good bowel habits for advice.

6. Monitor medications

Some medications have side effects that can affect the bladder and bowel. Be aware of what medications you are on for other health reasons.

7. Manage respiratory symptoms, especially coughs

Coughing can challenge the pelvic floor, cause leakage of urine and weaken the support structures. See leaflet on 'Managing your pelvic floor with a cough'.

8. Find your pelvic floor muscles and make them work for you

Your pelvic floor muscles are an important part of the support system that helps to close over the urethra to stop urine leaking, and also to keep the bladder held in position.

Your pelvic floor muscles need to work for you if you are sitting, standing, exercising or in other daily tasks.

See pelvic floor exercise leaflets for further advice on how to correctly exercise this group of muscles.

9. Urge suppression techniques

Sometimes there can be 'mixed messages' between the bladder and the brain, giving you the feeling of urgency to pass urine.

Techniques below can help to 'suppress' this urge until it passes, especially if you feel that you have voided recently.

- Try to stay calm and practice deep breathing. A rhythm of breathing in for 4, out for 4 can be useful to focus on.
- Cross your legs or rise up and down on your toes.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles, hold and breathe calmly.
- Distract your thoughts by checking your phone/ reading/ talking etc.

10. Tips for incomplete bladder emptying

If you often feel that you do not completely empty your bladder or get the urge to go again soon after finishing, try the following -

- Lean slightly forward with your elbows supported on your knees, relax your tummy and try several 'belly breaths'.
- Stand up and sit down several times before finally finishing.
- Tilt your pelvic gently back and forth . This helps to 'adjust' the organ position internally.
- Try gently contracting your pelvic floor muscles and then releasing. Do not push or strain.

For further information on managing bladder symptoms, please see the Pelvic Floor Centre Education Programme video 2.

SVHG document control

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