



## Healthy Bladder and Bowel Habits

There are 5 main factors in keeping up healthy bladder and bowel habits.

### 1. Eat well

We need a fibre rich diet, at least 30g of fibre each day. That equates to:

- 2-3 serves of fruit
- 5 serves of veges
- 5 serves of bread and cereals

This helps maintain a healthy body weight and makes your stools easier to pass. See our info sheet 'What's normal pooing?' for more information.

### 2. Drink Well

Drink at least 1.5 to 2L of water a day (unless advised otherwise by your doctor). The best drink is water, avoid caffeine, alcohol and fizzy drinks as they can irritate the bladder. Some people are not affected by these drinks, for others they wreak havoc!

Your urine should be a pale yellow colour. Darker urine can mean you need to increase your water intake, very bright coloured urine is common if you take vitamins. Your body is excreting what you don't need.

Drinking well dilutes your urine and makes it less irritating to your bladder lining. This makes it easier to hold on for longer periods between trips to the toilet.

### 3. Exercise regularly

Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise a day. Walking is great exercise. Your regular exercise needs to be on top of your usual daily activities. We are designed to gather our own food each day and to have quite labour intensive lives. As our lives have become less labour intensive we need to add in activity to keep our bodies moving enough.

Exercising regularly helps keep things moving along your digestive tract and so your stool easier to pass.

### 4. Keep your pelvic floor muscles well controlled and strong

Your pelvic floor muscles help maintain continence. They are contracted a little bit all the time to support the organs of your pelvis and then a lot when you cough, sneeze or laugh to stop you leaking. The pelvic floor muscles can be weakened by trauma such as childbirth, being overweight, lots of coughing or straining to open your bowels.

Your pelvic floor muscles need to be strong enough to do their job, but your brain also has to use them at the right time. A common problem is contracting them too late to stop you leaking when you cough – just like putting the brakes on in your car at the wrong time.

Maintaining good posture automatically helps keep your pelvic floor strong. Exercises like sit ups and doing things with your breath held can make your pelvic floor worse.

Doing pelvic floor exercises correctly is very important. Doing the incorrectly can be more harmful than not doing them at all. Get your pelvic floor contraction checked by one of our Pelvic Floor Physios to make sure what you are doing is right.



## 5. Practice good toilet habits

Your bladder fills over a period of time and gives you the urge that you need to go along the way. If you empty your bladder as soon as you get the first urge to do so, you train your bladder to only hold small volumes. Don't go to the toilet 'just in case', go when your bladder feels full.

Your bowel behaves differently. When your rectum fills with stool it happens quite quickly. The stool moves from higher up the bowel and is positioned ready to be expelled. It's best to empty your bowel when you get the urge to. This will often happen after a meal. This helps prevent constipation as the digestive tract can keep things moving along, rather than creating a backlog. Good pooing technique is very important to mechanically position your rectum so it can empty easily. Sit with your knees higher than your hips, with your feet on a small foot rest. Lean forwards with your elbows on your knees and relax your abdomen out. Make sure your spine is straight and not slumped. You are basically approximating a squat position – the ideal position to poo in. Let the poo come, don't force it out. Supporting your perineum (the area in front of your anus) can help too.

In a nutshell:

- Eat well to make your poo the right consistency
- Drink well to keep your poo the right consistency and keep your urine diluted and not irritating
- Exercise regularly to shake things along and keep your digestive tract moving
- Keep your pelvic floor well controlled and strong to keep dry
- Practice good toileting habits to keep in control of your bladder and to make it mechanically easier to empty your bowel.

This information is intended as general information only and is not intended as a substitute for an individual consultation with one of our Physios. This information sheet has been adapted from information in 'Healthy bladder and bowel habits' a publication of The Continence Foundation of Australia.