



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Maintaining a healthy bladder and bowel

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information,
please contact your GP practice

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Bladder

The bladder is a stretchy muscular organ “bag” that stores urine (wee) produced by the kidneys until you are ready to empty it. As the bladder fills with urine it should expand like a balloon. It will soon start to tell you that it is getting full. When your bladder is working normally you should be able to have a wee when you need to.

The bladder is supported by the pelvic floor muscles (these form a triangle in the base of the pelvis) and the urinary sphincter (a ring of muscle in the bladder neck).

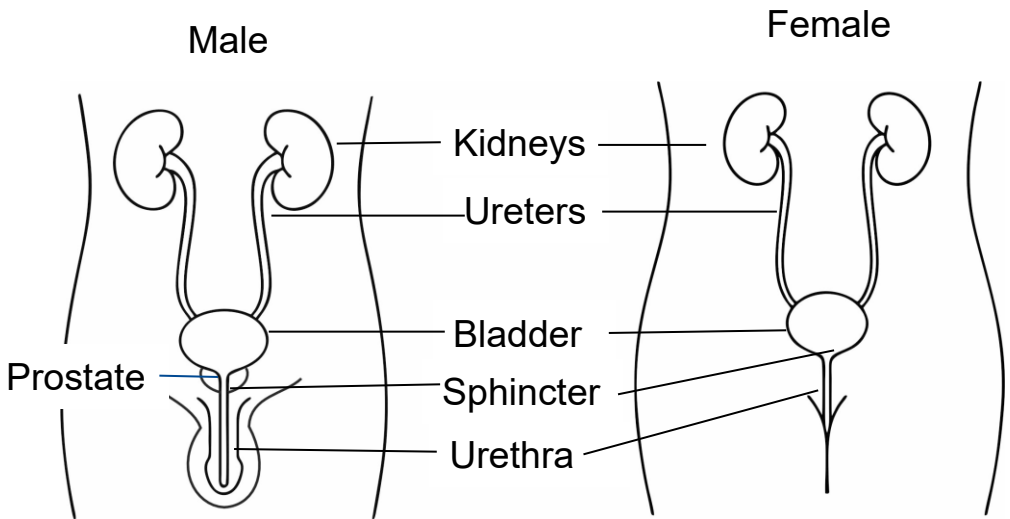
Your kidneys produce urine. The amount may vary depending on how much you drink and how much you lose through sweat and breathing.

A normal bladder will hold about 250-600mls (half to one pint) of liquid. A person will need to have a wee about four to seven times during the day and may need to get up during the night to wee as well.

Incontinence (accidental leakage of wee) which means you cannot stop is not a normal part of getting older. Both bladder and bowel problems can be caused by long term health conditions, lifestyle and medication.

Incontinence can be treated with medication or surgery and can be managed through your day-to-day life and what you eat and drink, which includes how much you drink, how much exercise you do or if you use any products such as continence pads.

Bladder anatomy



Things you can do to help your bladder

- Keep drinking (hydrate). Try to drink about one and a half to two litres every day. This is about six to eight mugs.
- Try to cut down on drinking tea and coffee as these may make you want to wee more often. You could try other decaffeinated options.
- Avoid or reduce alcohol, fizzy drinks, sweeteners and fruit juices.
- Do not get into the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'. Go when you feel you need to have a wee during the day.
- If you need to go to the toilet during the night, stop drinking two hours before going to bed.

- Do pelvic floor exercises every day. Your pelvic floor muscles help to stop leakage (incontinence). When they relax, they let the bladder and bowel empty easily. Like all muscles, regular exercise can help them to work better.

Pelvic Floor Exercises could include:

Long Squeezes:

Tighten your pelvic floor muscles and let them fully relax. Repeat the squeeze and hold till the pelvic floor muscles tire. Aim to do 10 long squeezes.

Short squeezes:

Quickly tighten your pelvic floor muscles, then quickly let them go again. Always let the muscles fully relax after each squeeze. Aim to do 10 short squeezes.

Try to do these three times a day.

If you have access on your mobile phone The 'Squeezy' app may help. <https://squeezyapp.com>

- Avoid constipation (this means that you have not had a poo at least three times in the last week) as this can make you need a wee more often and not always emptying it. (see pages 6 and 7 for advice and information).

- Containment products such as pads can be used. They must fit well and be suitable for your needs. You may be entitled to these from your local bladder and bowel service following an appointment with your GP.

If you have seen blood in your urine or have any changes in your weight or appetite, please go to see your GP.

If you feel any of the following it could be a sign that you have a virus (such as a urinary tract infection (UTI)). You need to contact your GP:

- Pain on passing urine.
- A raised temperature.
- New symptoms of urgency and frequency (needing a wee more often).
- New symptoms of incontinence.
- New feelings of confusion, difficulty making decisions.
- New lower abdominal (tummy) pain or loin (side) pain.
- Offensive smelling urine.
- Visible blood in urine.

Skin care

If you have incontinence the skin around your genital area needs to be washed using warm water and unscented soap.

If you are worried about your skin or have any sore areas, please contact your GP.

Bowels

You should have a poo at least three times a week. This should not involve pain, discomfort or excessive straining.

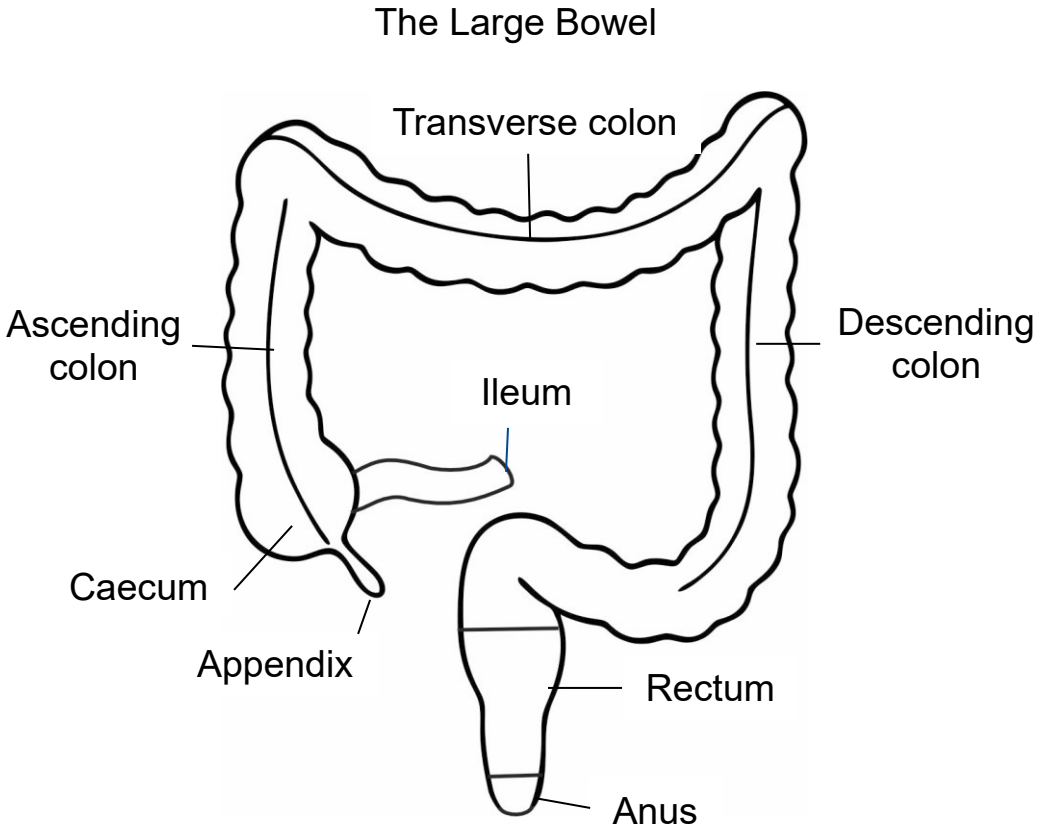
The bowel should feel empty following the bowel movement. The bowel movement should be soft, smooth and like a sausage.

If you are constipated (you cannot poo), you may:

- Feel unwell.
- Have a bad taste in your mouth.
- Have bad breath.
- Your tummy might be bloated.
- Lose your appetite or feel like you do not want to eat.
- Feel tired and unable to concentrate.
- Bowel motions (poos) may be hard and difficult to pass.

Some tablets may cause constipation for example painkillers, iron tablets and water tablets.

Bowel Anatomy



Things you can do to help your bowel

Fluids – Try to drink about one and a half to two litres every day, this is about six to eight mugs. But not fizzy drinks, tea or coffee and alcohol.

Exercise – try to do 30 minutes of exercise five times a week, for example walking, swimming, housework, cycling, going to the gym. If you find it hard to move, try to sit, stand, lie in different positions so that you are moving a little bit.

Diet - a healthy diet can help your bowel health. A healthy diet includes fruit, vegetables, cereals and proteins such as eggs, cheese, milk and fish. Fibre is also good for your bowels, such as brown bread, brown rice and a high fibre cereal such as Bran Flakes.

Opportunity – adopt a regular bowel routine. Try to have a poo 30 – 60 minutes after a meal. Do not ignore the feeling of needing to move your bowels (have a poo). Always make time to go to the toilet.

Position – try to sit in the correct position on the toilet. Your knees should be higher than your hips, lean forward, with your elbows on your knees.

If you have followed the above advice and are still not able to poo, medication to help you poo such as laxatives can be bought from a pharmacy or you can contact your GP.

If you see or feel any changes to your normal bowel routine, or if you see blood or mucus in your poo or have lost weight or do not feel you want to eat, please go and see your GP.

Please contact your GP if you experience bladder or bowel problems. Your GP will be able to contact the community or specialist nursing bladder and bowel team if they feel you need further help and support.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. Please contact the Single Point of Access Team on 01904 721200 if you would like to tell us more.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

<https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/coming-into-hospital/patient-information-leaflets/>

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