

# Managing Changes in Your Bladder Function After Cancer Treatment

## Information for cancer survivors

Read this resource to learn:

- what a urinary problem is
- what causes it
- what you can do to improve your urinary problems
- where to find more information



Many cancer patients can have bladder problems. Bladder problems can be embarrassing to you and affect your emotional health.

## **What are bladder problems?**

Leaking urine is called **urinary incontinence**.

Here are some problems that you may have:

### **Urinary frequency**

This means how often you may wet yourself or you need to urinate (pee). Some people can have minor leaks of urine. Other people can wet themselves often.

There are many types of urinary incontinence, including:

- **Stress incontinence:**

This means that you may leak urine when you do things that add pressure (stress) to your bladder, such as laughing, sneezing, coughing or lifting something heavy.

- **Urge incontinence:**

This is when you need to urinate very suddenly. This can happen often during the day and at night. You may not have enough time to get to a toilet before some urine leaks.

- **Overflow incontinence:**

This means that you leak some urine (maybe only a small amount) because your bladder is full and can't hold anymore urine.

## **What causes these bladder problems?**

Some cancer treatments can cause these bladder problems.

It is common for your urine to change color or smell during and just after your chemotherapy.

Talk with your doctor or nurse to learn what changes you should expect and how to handle them.

Urinary incontinence can be caused by:

- surgery
- radiation therapy
- certain medications
- cancer itself

## **What can I do?**

There are things you can do to help manage your bladder problems better.

Here are some things you can try:

### **1. Kegel exercises**

- Try to squeeze the muscles that stop you from passing gas or emptying your bladder.
- Squeeze these muscles and hold while counting to 3. Then relax them while counting to 3.

10 exercises are called 1 set.

Do 1 set 5 times a day.

For more information on these exercises, visit the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre library and see the **Urinary Incontinence: Pelvic Floor Exercises** pamphlet.

## **2. Bladder training**

There are many ways to train your bladder to work better.

- Try to train yourself to wait a little before you urinate. You can begin by waiting for a short time, such as a few minutes. Later, you can wait longer and longer.
- If you have overflow incontinence, or urinary tract infections, try timed voiding. Instead of waiting for the urge to urinate, try voiding 'by the clock' (for example every 2 hours).  
You can remind yourself by setting an alarm on your watch or phone. This also helps if you have an overactive bladder.

## **3. Body weight**

If you are overweight, trying to lose weight may improve your bladder problems. You can change your diet and exercise regularly to lose weight. The Canadian Food Guide has information about healthy eating. Speak to your family doctor for more help.

## **4. Drink many fluids**

Drink many liquids, even if you have to go to the bathroom a lot. Liquids help your body to work well.

## **5. Avoid certain fluids**

Some liquids can make bladder problems worse. Avoid these:

- Drinks that have caffeine such as coffee, black tea, soda.
- Drinks that have alcohol such as beer, wine, liquor.

## **6. Try to stop smoking**

If you smoke cigarettes, try to stop smoking. Speak to your family doctor about ways to stop smoking. It may help your bladder problems and may also have other health benefits for you.

## **7. Absorbent pads**

You can try to wear absorbent pads if you cannot control your bladder in public. They protect your clothes from getting wet. They can also keep you doing the things you do in your regular day.

## **How do I talk to my doctor about my urinary concerns?**

Before you see your family doctor, take some time to think about how your bladder problems are affecting your life.

Ask yourself these 3 questions and write some notes below:

**1. Are my bladder problems getting in the way of enjoying my life? If yes, how?**

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**2. How bad are my bladder problems?**

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**3. What is (are) the most stressful symptom(s) of my bladder problems?**

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Take this booklet with you when you go to see your doctor. Talk to your doctor about your answers. Let your doctor know how you feel. Only your doctor can help with some causes of bladder problems.

## What can I expect after seeing my doctor?

Your doctor will talk to you about different options that may help.

You may need special tests to find out what is happening in your body. You may need a referral to a specialist. Your doctor may also change or prescribe new medicine to see if it helps.

## Where can I get more information?

### **Topic: Urinary Incontinence – Pelvic Floor Exercises**

Organization: University Health Network

Website: [www.uhn.ca](http://www.uhn.ca) ► click “Search for Health Info” and use search to find pamphlets about bladder care. For example, ► click Pelvic Floor Exercises (Female) ([PDF](#)), Pelvic Floor Exercises (Male) ([PDF](#))

### **Topic: Inflammation of the bladder (Cystitis)**

Organization: Mayo Clinic

Website: [www.mayoclinic.com/health/cystitis/DS00285/METHOD=print](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cystitis/DS00285/METHOD=print)

### **Topic: Urinary incontinence**

Organization: Mayo Clinic

Website: [www.mayoclinic.com/health/urinary-incontinence/DS00404/METHOD=print](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/urinary-incontinence/DS00404/METHOD=print)

### **Topic: Overactive bladder**

Organization: Mayo Clinic

Website: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/overactive-bladder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355715>

**Topic: Stress Incontinence**

Organization: BUPA

Website: [www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/s/stress-incontinence](http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/s/stress-incontinence)

**Topic: Urge Incontinence**

Organization: BUPA

Website: [www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/u/urge-incontinence](http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/u/urge-incontinence)

**Topic: Urinary incontinence**

Organization: Women's health network

Website: <https://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/health-centres/pelvic-health/urinary-incontinence/>

**Topic: Tips for dealing with urinary incontinence**

Organization: Oncolink

Website: [www.oncolink.org/coping/article.cfm?c=5&s=76&ss=187&id=994](http://www.oncolink.org/coping/article.cfm?c=5&s=76&ss=187&id=994)

**Topic: Bladder, kidney and urinary tract problems**

Organization: Canadian Cancer Society

Website: [www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Treatment/Managing%20side%20effects/Bladder%20kidney%20and%20urinary%20tract.aspx?sc\\_lang=en&p=1](http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Treatment/Managing%20side%20effects/Bladder%20kidney%20and%20urinary%20tract.aspx?sc_lang=en&p=1)

## Remember:

- ✓ Daily Kegel and bladder training exercises
- ✓ Eat healthy and drink lots of fluids
- ✓ Avoid alcoholic, caffeinated fluids
- ✓ Stop smoking
- ✓ Wear absorbent pads



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