



Healthy Bladder Habits

In this handout, you will find helpful tips for improving your bladder control. Remember everyone is a bit different. Regaining bladder control takes time. We will be with you every step of the way!

While no one technique will work for everyone, the first five, in no specific order, typically provide the best/fastest improvement in bladder control.

- **Urge Control Technique:**
 - Managing urinary urges can go a long way to improve quality of life.
 - Please refer to 'Urge Control Technique' on the next page for the best way to help control your urinary urges.
 - Practice!

- **Bladder Irritants:**
 - Bladder irritants can cause your bladder to feel full/irritated.
 - Many foods/drinks can irritate the bladder.
 - Everyone is a bit different; it is important to watch for patterns with your diet.
 - **Common Bladder Irritants:**
 - Alcohol.
 - Carbonated beverages, any variety -- VERY common.
 - Chocolate.
 - Citrus fruits, including juice (orange, lemon).
 - Coffee, Tea (black or citrus herbal) caffeinated and decaf.
 - Heavily seasoned/spicy foods (Chinese, Mexican).
 - Sugar: including sugars found in juices, milk.
 - Artificial sweeteners.
 - Tomatoes, including juice.

- **Kegels:**
 - Practice!
 - Hold a Kegel prior to sneezing, coughing, laughing, standing up, or lifting something heavy. Eventually Kegels will become automatic.
 - See the next page for 'how to' on Kegels.

- **Limit fluids before bedtime:**
 - Decrease fluid intake at least three hours before bed time.

- **Constipation:**
 - Constipation can negatively affect your bladder control.
 - If you struggle with constipation, talk to your provider.

- **Bladder Re-Training:**
 - Begin to increase the time between bathroom breaks. Start with every hour. Then over the course of a week increase bathroom breaks to every 90 minutes. After a couple of weeks, start to increase to every 2 hours. Continue to increase the time between breaks until you have found a satisfactory time frame.
 - Avoid bathroom breaks 'just in case'. While these breaks seem like a good idea, increased voiding episodes can lead to decreased bladder control.

- **Emptying your Bladder:**
 - During bathroom breaks, do not rush. If your bladder doesn't feel empty, move around a bit and attempt to void again. Stand up and after sitting back down use the Credé maneuver to attempt to void. Do NOT bear down though.
 - Credé maneuver:
 - Make a fist and press it into your lower abdomen, just below the navel to help with emptying your bladder.

- **Obesity:**
 - Obesity can negatively affect your bladder control.
 - If you struggle with obesity, talk to your provider about techniques for healthy weight loss.

- **Smoking:**
 - Smoking is bad for your overall health including bladder control.
 - Many resources are available to help you quit, talk to your provider.

- **Wear clothes that are easy to remove when it is time to void.**
 - This goes well with practicing urge control.

- **When at home, make the toilet easy to reach.**
 - Consider a bedside commode or urinal.

KEGEL Exercises

Kegel (KAY-gull) exercises also known as pelvic floor muscle exercises were designed to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles help control your urethral sphincters, which are the muscles that control when you urinate. If your muscles are weak, that can cause your urine to leak. Luckily, through regular exercise, you can increase the strength of these muscles, which increases the 'shut off' signal in the brain/bladder neuro pathway. Increase strength will also weaken the 'urge' neuro pathway between the brain/bladder. For many patients, a healthier brain/bladder neuro pathway leads to improved or even regained bladder control.

How to:

First, you must identify the muscle. Next time you are urinating, try to stop your stream. The muscles you felt move/activate are the ones used during a Kegel. If you did not feel anything, try the next time. If you still can't quite get the feeling, try to stop an episode of 'passing gas' or hold back a bowel movement. The muscles that active are the same ones.

****The above are great ways to determine which muscles you need to strengthen. Do NOT stop your stream or hold back gas/stool on a consistent basis.****

It is important not to engage other muscles – abdominal muscles, leg/thigh muscles, or buttocks muscles. If you aren't sure if those muscles are engaging, put your hand on them while doing a Kegel. If you feel them contract, continue to experiment until you have isolated the pelvic floor muscles.

Once you have identified the correct set of muscles, pick a time during the morning, afternoon, and evening to perform your reps. Kegels can be done while in the car, waiting in line for coffee, during a meeting, watching TV, or brushing your teeth. It doesn't matter if you are sitting, standing, or laying down.

Contractions: start with holding for a count of 3. Slowly increase to a count of 10.

Relax Completely for a count of 10 after doing one rep/Kegel. Rest is important to prevent fatiguing the muscle which could lead to more leaking.

Do 10 reps X 3 sets morning, afternoon, and night.

Usually laying down or sitting is the easiest position to start. As time progresses, try standing.

A Kegel exercise can be done before any activity that causes leaking – sneezing, coughing, laughing.

Remember: It can take six weeks before you begin to see results. Do not become discouraged. Many people, even ones with long standing incontinence concerns, are able to see improvement with Kegels.

Urge Control Technique

When you have the urge to void, do the following:

1. Stop what you are doing.
 - a. If you can, gently sit down.
 - b. Stay very still – being still makes controlling the urge easier.
2. Do five quick Kegel exercises with NO relaxation in between.
3. Relax your body.
 - a. Take a few deep breaths.
4. Concentrate on suppressing the urge to void.
5. Allow the urge to subside.
6. Once the urge has lessened, walk to the bathroom. Do NOT run.
 - a. Continue to do Kegels on the way to the bathroom.

Practice! before you have to use it.

Do 10 reps X 3 sets morning, afternoon, and night along with your Kegel Exercises.

****Controlling the urge to void is not always easy or fun. BUT it can be done. Even people with long standing urgency/frequency have had success with the above technique.**