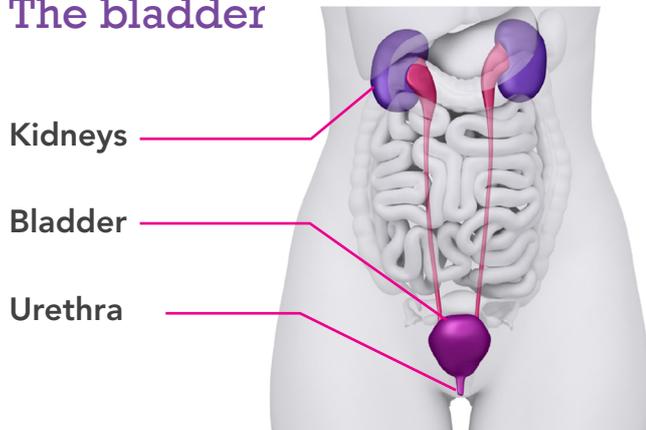


# Bladder & bowel health

## The bladder



Kidneys

Bladder

Urethra

### A healthy bladder

- Empties 4-8 times daily, maybe once overnight
- Empties about every 3-4 hours
- Holds around 2 cups of urine (400-600ml)
- May wake you when full, but gives you enough time to find a toilet

## What can go wrong?

### Incontinence

Accidental or involuntary leakage of urine:

- Urge incontinence is when urine leaks due to an urgent feeling to empty the bladder and not enough time to get to a toilet
- Stress incontinence is when urine leaks if you jump, run, stand up, cough or sneeze.

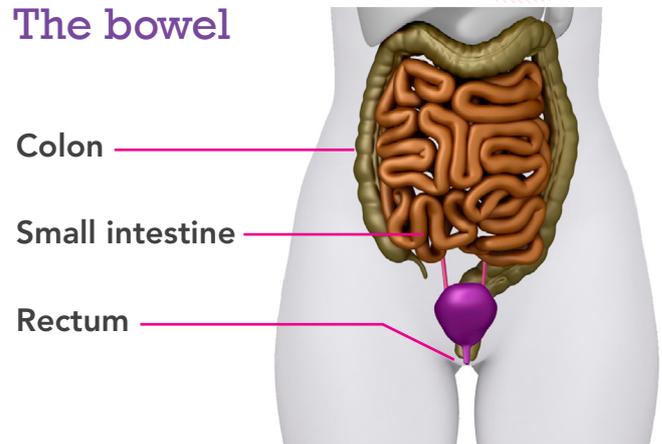
### Urinary tract infections (UTIs)

UTIs are infections of the urinary tract that can affect the bladder, urethra (the tube that passes urine from the bladder to outside the body), and/or kidneys. UTIs are caused by bacteria entering the urinary system, usually via the urethra.

### Bladder prolapse

Also called a cystocele, weakened supportive tissue and pelvic floor muscles cause the bladder to bulge into the vaginal wall.

## The bowel



Colon

Small intestine

Rectum

### A healthy bowel

- Bowel movements several times a day to several times a week are normal. A change in bowel movements needs follow-up with your doctor
- Stools (poo) should be soft, sausage shaped, easy to pass and are almost always brown
- It's normal for stools to smell, because of bacteria that help digestion

## What can go wrong?

### Incontinence

Accidental or involuntary leakage of stools or wind – commonly caused by constipation, but may also be associated with diarrhoea.

### Constipation & diarrhoea

With constipation, stools are usually hard, dry and painful to pass.

Diarrhoea occurs when the intestinal lining becomes inflamed and irritated, making it difficult for water to be absorbed from food waste, causing loose bowel motions.

## Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

With IBS, the muscle wall of the bowel becomes overly sensitive and contracts unevenly, resulting in pain and bloating.

## Bowel prolapse (rectocele)

Bowel prolapse occurs when weakened supportive tissue and pelvic floor muscles cause the bowel to bulge forward into the back vaginal wall.

## Bowel cancer (colorectal cancer)

Bowel cancer is a cancerous growth inside the lining of the large bowel. Most bowel cancers start as polyps, which look like small spots on the bowel lining, or like cherries on stalks, protruding from the wall of the bowel. Australia has a high rate of bowel cancer, so talk to your doctor about your risk.

## What can you do for bladder & bowel health?

- Drink 6-8 cups or glasses of fluid per day. Not getting enough fluid makes stools hard, dry and difficult to pass, increasing the strain on your pelvic floor
- Cut down on caffeinated and fizzy drinks and alcohol, as they can worsen symptoms by making you need to urinate urgently or frequently
- To avoid constipation and strain on the pelvic floor, try to eat fibre daily, such as fruit, vegetables and cereals/breads
- Physical activity stimulates bowel movement. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days. Avoiding high-impact activities and heavy weights will reduce strain on the pelvic floor
- Learn and do pelvic floor exercises regularly to strengthen muscles

- Avoid heavy lifting, as this can weaken your pelvic floor
- Chronic coughing, including from smoking, can weaken your pelvic floor. For help with quitting smoking call the Quitline on **13 7848** or visit **quit.org.au**
- Incontinence may become worse after menopause due to a reduction in oestrogen, leading to reduced elasticity in the pelvic floor and vagina. Sometimes oestrogen therapies, either vaginally or as menopause hormone therapy (MHT), may help
- If you are over 50, have regular screening for bowel cancer
- Positive toilet habits:
  - Go only when you have the urge and avoid the habit of going 'just in case'
  - Sit with feet firmly supported to fully relax your pelvic floor; use a footstool when emptying bowels
  - Never strain to empty bladder or bowels
  - Don't stop the flow of urine midstream as an exercise, as this can send incorrect messages to your bladder and stop it from emptying completely
- Continence pads and accessories can help you feel more comfortable and maintain your quality of life.

For more information go to [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/bladder-bowel](http://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/bladder-bowel)

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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