

BLADDER HEALTH

WHAT IS CONSIDERED NORMAL?

- The average bladder can hold about 2 cups of urine before it needs to be emptied.
- The normal range of voiding urine is 6 to 8 times during a 24 hour period. As we get older, our bladder capacity can get smaller and we may need to pass urine more frequently but usually not more than every 2 hours.
- Urine should flow easily without discomfort in a good, steady stream until the bladder is empty. No pushing or straining is necessary to empty the bladder.
- An urge is a signal that you feel as the bladder stretches to fill with urine. Urges can be felt even if the bladder is not full. Urges are not commands to go to the toilet, merely a signal and can be controlled.

WHAT ARE GOOD BLADDER HABITS?

- Take your time when emptying your bladder. Don't strain or push to empty your bladder. Make sure you empty your bladder completely each time you pass urine. Do not rush the process.
- Consistently ignoring the urge to go (waiting more than 4 hours between toileting) or urinating too infrequently may be convenient but not healthy for your bladder.
- Avoid going to the toilet "just in case" or more often than every 2 hours. It is usually not necessary to go when you feel the first urge. Try to go only when your bladder is full. Urgency and frequency of urination can be improved by retraining the bladder and spacing your fluid intake throughout the day. Practice good toilet habits. Don't let your bladder control your life.

TIPS TO MAINTAIN GOOD BLADDER HABITS

- Maintain a good fluid intake. Depending on your body size and environment, drink 6 - 8 cups (8 oz each) of fluid per day unless otherwise advised by your doctor. Not enough fluid creates a foul odor and dark color of the urine.
- Limit the amount of caffeine (coffee, cola, chocolate or tea) and citrus foods that you consume as these foods can be associated with increased sensation of urinary urgency and frequency. See the handout "How Diet Can Affect Your Bladder" for more information.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Alcohol increases urine production and also makes it difficult for the brain to coordinate bladder control.
- Avoid constipation by maintaining a balanced diet of dietary fiber.

Cigarette smoking is also irritating to the bladder surface and is associated with bladder cancer. In addition, the coughing associated with smoking may lead to increased incontinent episodes.