

Bladder and bowel health



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Most people find speaking about bladder and bowel issues difficult. Even with health professionals, trusted loved ones, or friends. Another barrier for people seeking help for a bladder or bowel issue is the idea that the problem is simply related to ageing.

There are many changes in the body that are the normal result of ageing. The most obvious changes are the tone and elasticity of our skin and muscles. A reduction in muscle tone can affect the strength of the pelvic floor muscles. This makes it more likely that you leak urine. Especially when you cough, sneeze, bend, rise from sitting to standing, or lift something heavy.



The pelvic floor

Like any other muscles in the body, the pelvic floor muscles need to be exercised to maintain their strength. For a strong pelvic floor, add pelvic floor muscle exercises into your daily routine.

[Read more about pelvic floor health here.](#)

A loss of muscle tone can also affect bowel continence. As we age, bowel motility reduces which may lead to constipation. Constipation can cause further bowel issues including faecal incontinence. It can also contribute to urinary incontinence by putting pressure on the bladder. Constant straining leads to stretching of the pelvic floor muscles.

To reduce these issues, you can change your fluid and food intake. Correcting your toileting position and doing more exercise can also help.

Adults normally need to empty their bladder about four to six times a day. As we age, reduced bladder muscle tone and capacity to hold urine, can result in increased urinary frequency and the need to go to the toilet more often.

Take your time when you go to the toilet and make sure that you are not rushing so that you are able to empty your bladder or bowel completely. Despite the temptation to do so, don't go to the toilet 'just in case.' If you are over 65 years of age, it is not unusual to need to get up once during the night to pass urine.

The prostate gland

In men, the prostate gland enlarges from about 50 years of age, which can lead to difficulty in starting to pass urine, slowing of the stream of urine, and the sense of needing to pass urine frequently. It may also increase the need to pass urine during the night, which can significantly interrupt the person's sleep.

[Read more about prostate health here.](#)

Seeking support

There's no denying that some of us will develop incontinence as we age. But it's important that you don't accept this as an inevitable part of ageing. Even if incontinence is not cured, symptoms can be reduced. This will help you continue to engage in normal life and find meaning and purpose.

There are changes in our bodies that occur as we age. But most of the significant changes we experience are related to lifestyle, environment, life events such as pregnancy and childbirth, and disease or surgery rather than just ageing.

Don't put up with uncomfortable symptoms related to your bowel and bladder. **Seek help by calling the free National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66 (8am to 8pm Monday to Friday) or talk with your preferred healthcare practitioner.**

The helpline is staffed by [Nurse Continence Specialists](#) who offer confidential information, advice, and support to people affected by incontinence and other bowel and bladder issues. The helpline provides a wide range of continence-related resources and referrals to local services and an interpreter service is available.

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