

# Diet & Daily Habits:

## Can this affect your bladder or bowel control?

There is no "diet" to cure incontinence. However, there are certain dietary matters you should know about.

Many people who have bladder control problems reduce the amount of liquids they drink in the hope that they will need to urinate less often. While less liquid through the mouth does result in less liquid in the form of urine, the smaller amount of urine may be more highly concentrated thus, irritating to the bladder surface. Highly concentrated (dark yellow, strong-smelling) urine may cause you to go to the bathroom more frequently. It also encourages growth of bacteria. And when bacteria begin to grow, infection sets in, and incontinence may be the result. Do not restrict fluids to control incontinence without the advice of your physician. Always follow your doctor's instructions.

Some foods cause urine to smell bad or peculiar. The most notable of these foods is asparagus. Some other foods may affect the way your urine smells. Another cause of foul-smelling urine, and the most dangerous cause, is urinary tract infection. If you notice that your urine has a strong odor and you have not eaten any foods that would cause this, you should see a physician and have a specimen of your urine tested for infection.

Some medicines may cause your urine to be discolored or have an unusual odor. Some are medicines that you take for bladder inflammation or for urine tests. Others you take for separate health conditions. If your urine has a peculiar color or odor, consult the pharmacist who filled your prescription.

Some foods and beverages are thought to contribute to bladder leakage. Their effect on the bladder is not always understood, but you may want to see if

eliminating one or all of the items listed improves your urine control.

### COMMON BLADDER IRRITANTS:

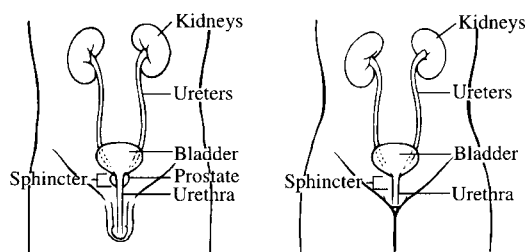
Alcoholic beverages	Beer
Carbonated beverages	Wine
Soft drinks with caffeine	Tea
Milk/milk products	Sugar
Coffee (even decaf.)	Honey
Medicines with caffeine	Chocolate
Tomato-based products	Tomatoes
Citrus juice & fruits	Corn Syrup
Highly spiced foods	Artificial sweetener

Grape juice, cranberry juice, cherry juice, and apple juice are thirst-quenchers that usually are not irritating to a normal bladder. Cranberry juice (or cranberry tablets) and cherry juice may help control urine odor. The best beverage is water. A very thin slice of lemon (not enough citrus juice to irritate the bladder) may improve the taste of water enough that you will find it enjoyable.

Pelvic muscle exercises are recommended to help women maintain bladder control throughout their lifetime. NAFC has a one-page explanation of these exercises and an audio cassette and booklet for further coaching. Women are subject to irritation of the lower urinary system, because the urethra [tube from the bladder to the outside of the body] is very short.

**Male**

**Female**



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Promoting Quality  
Continence Care through

**Consumer  
Education**

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They should avoid nylon underpants and pantyhose next to their body. Cotton underpants are preferable. Women should avoid colored and perfumed toilet tissue and sanitary napkins because the dyes and perfumes may be irritating. They should not use detergent bath additives. Some urologists suggest that women never sit in a bathtub and always take a shower. If you have symptoms that feel like infection such as, bladder pain, urgency, and frequency; but your doctor says you do not have an infection, you should see a specialist. The information in this leaflet is directed to people with bladder leakage, not to people whose main problem is irritative voiding symptoms.

Constipation could be a cause of your bladder control problems. When the rectum is full of stool, it may disturb the bladder and cause the sensation of urgency and frequency. If you have a history of constipation or have recently become constipated, see your physician.

Constipation may be caused by the medicines you are taking, a “sluggish bowel,” or other conditions. Most people in Western society should add more bulk to their diet in the form of a high-fiber diet, fiber additives, or bulking agents. Discuss your need for fiber with your doctor, pharmacist, or a nutritionist. When you add fiber to your diet, it is important that you not restrict fluids. Also, you may note that you feel bloated and have gas in the beginning. This discomfort will be temporary. If you are constipated, this *Special Recipe* will be helpful.

### SPECIAL RECIPE

1 cup applesauce  
1 cup oat bran  
1/4 cup prune juice  
Spices as desired  
(*cinnamon, nutmeg, etc.*)

This recipe may be stored in your refrigerator or in the freezer. Pre-measured servings may be frozen in sectioned ice cube trays, or foam plastic egg cartons, and thawed as needed.

Begin with two tablespoons each evening followed by one 6 to 8 ounce glass of water or juice. After 7 to 10 days increase this to three

tablespoons. At the end of the second to third week increase it to four tablespoons. You should begin to see an improvement in your bowel habits in two weeks. You should make this a part of your daily routine for your lifetime. It is good for you!

When you begin using the *Special Recipe*, remember it is high fiber. You may be troubled by gas and bloating, but this should go away in several weeks.

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*Any change in bowel habits should be reported to your physician. A change in bowel habits is one of the seven danger signals listed by the American Cancer Society.*

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Obesity is a dangerous health problem. It also contributes to incontinence in females. Some women notice improved bladder control when they lose weight.

Cigarette smoking is irritating to the bladder surface. Smoking is also associated with bladder cancer. Coughing associated with smoking may lead to stress incontinence during coughing spasms. You should stop smoking today for these and many other reasons.

In older people and people limited by arthritis or other disabilities, it is important to:

- Use the toilet regularly — every 2½ to 3½ hours.
- Wear clothes that are easy to get off when it is time to go to the toilet.
- Remain on the toilet until your bladder is empty. If you feel there is still some urine in the bladder, stand up and then sit back down again and lean forward slightly over the knees. This is called “double voiding” and may help you empty your bladder.
- Make the toilet facilities convenient. This may mean a bedside commode, bedpan, or urinal placed conveniently near or in the bed.
- Empty your bladder before you start on a journey of an hour or more. Don’t try to “wait until I get home to my own bathroom.”



National Association for Continence (NAFC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with incontinence. NAFC is a leading source of education, advocacy, and support to the public and to the health profession about the causes, prevention, diagnosis, treatments, and management alternatives for incontinence.

Always consult your doctor before trying anything recommended in this or any other publication that speaks to general health issues.

For more information about incontinence, write or call:

**NAFC**  
National Association for Continence

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