

# EMPTYING YOUR BLADDER AFTER BIRTH



the women's  
the royal women's hospital  
victoria australia

Following the birth of your baby, you may have difficulty emptying your bladder or have changes to the normal sensation to pass urine. If the bladder is not emptying properly then the urine that is left behind can build up over time, this is known as Urinary Retention.

Urinary retention can cause over stretching and damage to the bladder and may be caused by:

- pressure on the bladder and pelvic floor during delivery
- swelling, bruising and/or pain in the pelvic area, particularly around the urethra (urine tube).

## What urinary retention might feel like

- Bladder pain or discomfort.
- No sensation to empty the bladder.
- Difficulty passing urine.
- A sense of not fully emptying.
- A slow or a start/stop stream of urine.
- A need to strain to pass urine.
- Leakage from an overly full bladder.

## How to keep your bladder healthy

### Drink plenty of fluids

New mothers need to be drinking 1.5–2L of fluid each day. Your drinks should be spread out over the day so you don't suddenly overload or overfill the bladder. Not drinking enough fluid can irritate the bladder and make symptoms worse.

Avoid tea, coffee and cola soft drinks as the caffeine in them can irritate your bladder and can also worsen your symptoms.

### Go to the toilet regularly

To prevent your bladder overfilling go to the toilet every two to three hours. Do not strain when you empty your bladder and bowels.

The best position to sit on the toilet is:

- Sit leaning forward with your feet flat.



- Legs wide apart with your elbows on your thighs.
- Let your tummy bulge out and relax.
- Always sit on the toilet seat. Do not hover above it.
- Stay relaxed on the toilet; relax your breathing.
- Allow yourself time, do not rush.

Try double bladder emptying

- If you feel your bladder has not completely emptied, rock your pelvis backwards and forwards on the toilet seat and try again or stand up, rock your pelvis backwards and forwards then sit down and try again.

## Hints to help empty your bladder

- Press gently above your pubic bone over your bladder.
- Urinate in a warm shower.
- Run water in the background.
- Place your hand in cold water as you empty your bladder.

Ask your midwife or doctor for pain medication if pain is stopping you from emptying your bladder. Exercise your pelvic floor muscles

Your pelvic floor muscles are important for healthy bladder function. Do your pelvic floor exercises every day. Make sure you can feel your pelvic floor muscles relax after each exercise.

For more information on pelvic floor exercise see our fact sheet *Improving your recovery after birth*

## For more information or advice

### Physiotherapy Department

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