

# Emptying your bladder after birth

The Royal Women's Hospital Fact Sheet / [www.thewomens.org.au](http://www.thewomens.org.au)



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**Following the birth of your baby, you may have difficulty emptying your bladder or have no sensation to pass urine. This means you can't fully empty your bladder. 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 (tube passing urine).

## 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.
- Running water in the background can help you to empty your bladder.
- 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. Your physiotherapy postnatal handout explains how to perform these exercises correctly. Do your pelvic floor exercises every day. When you are doing your pelvic floor exercises 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*

After you are discharged from hospital

You may be asked to attend a follow-up appointment with a physiotherapist, usually one week following your discharge from hospital.

Your physiotherapist may ask you to fill out a 3 Day Bladder Diary when you go home. In the diary please record the number of drinks you have and the output from your bladder. This information is used to assess how your bladder is functioning.

### **Please bring your 3 Day Bladder Diary to your follow-up appointment if you have completed one.**

Women experiencing urinary retention may be discharged home from hospital with a catheter still in place. These women will be asked to return to the hospital one week after going home to have their bladder function assessed.

### **For more information or advice**

#### **If you are a patient at the Women's**

#### **Urogynaecology Pelvic Floor Service**

Midwife and Continence Advisor  
The Royal Women's Hospital  
Tel: (03) 8345 2000

#### **Physiotherapy Department**

The Royal Women's Hospital  
Tel: (03) 8345 3160  
Monday to Friday 8.30am–5.00pm

#### **For women in Victoria**

#### **Women's Health Information Centre**

The Royal Women's Hospital  
Tel: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)  
Email: [whic@thewomens.org.au](mailto:whic@thewomens.org.au)