

Diet, Habits and Pelvic Health

Tips for Women with Pelvic Floor Dysfunction or Bladder Control Problems

Foods and Beverages

There is no “diet” to cure pelvic floor dysfunction or 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 and, thus, irritating to the bladder surface. Highly concentrated, dark yellow, strong 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. Drink lots of water every day and do not restrict fluids to try to control incontinence. There are other, more favorable measures that can help prevent incontinence.

Some foods and beverages may contribute to bladder irritation. You may want to see if eliminating one or all of the items listed below will improve your symptoms. Keep in mind, the best beverage for your bladder health is water. Drink lots of it. If you do not enjoy water, try adding a thin slice of lemon to improve the taste. Grape juice, cherry juice and apple juice are usually not irritating to the bladder. Experiment with avoiding the following potential bladder irritants (the first 5 are the most common irritants).

Alcoholic beverages	Citrus juice and fruits
Tomatoes	Artificial sweeteners
Tomato-based products	Medicines with caffeine
Carbonated beverages	Milk or Milk products
Soft drinks with caffeine	Sugar
Highly spiced foods	Honey
Coffee (even decaffeinated)	Chocolate
Tea (even decaffeinated)	Corn syrup

Healthy Bladder Habits

Being a woman, you 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. Avoid nylon underwear and pantyhose next to your body. Cotton underwear is preferable. Avoid colored and perfumed toilet tissue or scented sanitary napkins - dyes and perfumes may be irritating. Do not use scented laundry detergent or scented bath additives.

Smoking Irritates the Bladder

Cigarette smoking is irritating to the bladder wall, and is also associated with bladder cancer. Coughing associated with smoking may lead to stress incontinence during coughing spasms.

Constipation Can Be a Bladder and Pelvic Floor Irritant

Common in women, constipation may disturb the bladder and cause the sensation of urgency and frequency. If you suffer chronic constipation, try some of the remedies listed below. Your bladder will thank you.

Iron Supplements Can Cause Constipation. Do not take iron unless it has been recommended for anemia, and if so, ask your doctor about an iron supplement that is not as likely to cause constipation.

Some Calcium Supplements can Cause Constipation. Most calcium supplements are calcium carbonate, which constipates. Calcium citrate (generic or Citracal brand) does not.

Try These Non-prescription Remedies for Constipation:

1. **MiraLAX.** The best and easiest to use! Follow directions on the label, and if you don't get results, use it twice daily. This remedy can be used long term – daily forever if needed. If side effects occur (uncommon, but some have nausea, dizziness), try using a half dose daily. It often works just as well as the full dose. Drink plenty of water when using MiraLAX.
2. **Flaxseed: An Excellent Natural Remedy for Constipation**
 - Adding ground flaxseed to your diet is a great way to increase fiber intake and keep you regular. It's also a great source of omega 3 fats. You can find it at health food stores with the label Bob's Red Mill - Golden Flaxseed Meal. Look for a yellow bag in the refrigerated section. Golden flaxseed has a milder flavor than the regular (brown) flaxseed.
 - Use 1- 4 Tbsp ground flaxseed per day (*every* day!) to keep bowel regular. Start with 1T, and increase to 4T or more, as needed. If you start with a large amount all at once, you may experience bloating and gas, but starting slowly will usually prevent this unpleasantness.
 - Stir the ground flaxseed it into oatmeal, cereal, soup, yogurt, smoothies, or any food that will allow. If that means you eat soup for breakfast every day, do it. Getting this into your daily routine can change your life for the better!
 - Add it to your food just before eating. If you cook a liquid food with the flaxseed added (such as adding to soup as you cook) it will turn gummy and thick. If you add it just before eating it's barely noticed and should not alter your enjoyment of the dish, provided you don't add too much. Adding ground flaxseed into scrambled eggs as you cook them works, too (better tolerated if you add cheese, veggies or other goodies).
 - Do not purchase ground flaxseed unless it is located in the refrigerated section of the store. Once flaxseed is ground, it becomes rancid quickly. Rancid flaxseed has a bad smell and taste (like linseed oil), and rancidity renders the omega fats to be of no benefit to your body.
 - Store ground flaxseed in the freezer or refrigerator to prevent it from going rancid quickly.
 - To save money, you may purchase whole flaxseed, which has a long shelf life, even if not chilled. A coffee grinder may be used to grind the seeds in small batches as needed. This is too much trouble for most of us. Buying ground flaxseed is convenient, and is less costly than medications for constipation.
3. **Eat prunes.** Really, it works!
4. **Milk of Magnesia** - 2 Tbs. every 8 hours until results. May cause cramping.
5. **Colace** - (non-prescription pills) 2 times a day. May cause cramping.