

# Nu Digest

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## Steps to Better Bladder Health

By Lesley Phelan Dally, MSSW, CCM

Bladder health is not often discussed, but it affects everyone. One-third of Americans aged 40 and over report at least some urinary incontinence. For intermittent catheter users, proper hygiene, lifestyle changes and exercises can help ensure the bladder remains healthy, reduce infection risk and help prevent urine leakage.

The bladder is one of the most vital organs in the body. It is a hollow organ, much like a balloon, that collects urine the kidneys excrete before it is eliminated through urination. The bladder is located in the lower abdomen and is part of the urinary system, which also includes the kidneys, ureters and urethra. The pelvic floor muscles help hold urine in the bladder.

The following guidelines are everyday ways to ensure bladder health and reduce infection risks.

**Drink enough water.** Stagnant urine in the bladder can become a breeding ground for bacteria and cause a bladder infection. Because of this, it is important to drink six to eight, 8-ounce glasses of water every day to keep the urine clear. Consume alcohol, coffee, tea and soda in moderation. Alcohol and caffeine can increase bladder activity and lead to leakage. Intermittent catheter users should follow their physician's order for the amount and

type of liquid to consume daily. In general, the bladder should be emptied every three to four hours.

**Maintain a healthy weight, and eat the right food.** The heavier one weighs, the more pressure is put on the bladder. Adequate exercise and a moderate diet help maintain a healthy bladder. Avoid foods that bother the bladder like chocolate, and spicy or acidic foods like tomatoes and citrus fruits. Incorporate plenty of fruits, vegetables and fiber on a daily basis to avoid constipation and maintain health.

**Practice Good Hygiene.** Use the bathroom when needed, and at the time interval instructed by your physician for intermittent catheterization. Holding urine in the bladder for too long can weaken the bladder muscles and may increase the potential for a bladder infection. It's important to completely empty the bladder so that overtime bladder infections are avoided. After a bowel movement, always wipe from front to back only, especially females, to prevent bacteria from the anus entering the vagina or urethra and causing an infection.

For intermittent catheter users, proper hygiene is essential to avoiding infection. Always wash your hands before and after catheterization, practice sterile self-catheterization and use a new intermittent catheter every time you empty the bladder.

If incontinence briefs or pads are utilized, they should be changed every three to four hours to reduce excess moisture and lingering odors.

**Do pelvic floor muscle exercises.** The pelvic floor muscles help hold urine in the bladder. Doing daily pelvic floor exercises strengthens the muscles and can help prevent leakage when one sneezes, coughs, lifts, laughs or has a sudden urge to urinate.

**When should you call your doctor?** When you have symptoms of a urinary tract infection (UTI) or bladder infection, you should immediately call your doctor for treatment. Common symptoms include:

- Painful insertion of the intermittent catheter or significant trouble inserting into the urethra
- Fever of 100° Fahrenheit or higher
- Pain in your back and kidney area
- Sudden onset leaking between catheterizations
- Changes in your urine: increased mucus, cloudy or a noticeable change in color, strong odors or blood in the urine
- Nausea, loss of appetite, headache or increased fatigue

Maintaining a healthy bladder is possible by practicing proper hygiene, consuming a healthy diet and liquid intake and staying aware of changes in your urine output.



#### **About the Author**

*Lesley Phelan Dally, MSSW, CCM is a social worker and certified case manager who has been practicing in the healthcare field for the last decade, primarily at Craig Hospital where she specialized in the case management of spinal cord injury rehabilitation. She has also worked in the areas of emergency psychiatric intervention and domestic violence. Lesley is a member of the Rocky Mountain Society of Urologic Nurses & Associates and the United Spinal Association. She was elected to be the Denver Regional Representative for the National Association of Social Workers in 2015 and will finish her 2 year term in August 2017. She is licensed in Colorado with a Master of Science in Social Work and is certified as a Case Manager by the Commission for Case Manager Certification. Lesley joined the Numotion Medical Supply Division in April 2016 as an Account Manager.*