DANISH HEALTH
AUTHORITY

Holding on to your water

Information and guidance on how to prevent urinary incontinence

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Danish Health Authority
Islands Brygge 67
2300 Copenhagen S

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You are not alone

Many Danes suffer from urinary incontinence, and the condition is commonly considered a natural part of the ageing process. Urinary incontinence may seem like a difficult subject to talk about, but that does not mean you have to suffer in silence. Urinary incontinence can be prevented and alleviated.

In this booklet you can read about what you can do to prevent urinary incontinence and how you can get help.

What is urinary incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is involuntary leakage of urine. It can take the form of small drips or large amounts of urine that the person cannot hold back.

We distinguish between two types of urinary incontinence:

- Stress incontinence is involuntary urination that happens when you laugh, cough, sneeze, or when you are physically active.
- Urge incontinence is involuntary urination when you get a sudden urge to pass water that you cannot hold back.

You can also experience a combination of stress and urge incontinence.

Urinary incontinence may cause problems with hygiene and socialising. If you suffer from urinary incontinence, you may wish to isolate yourself and/or avoid certain activities, and it may affect both your quality of life and well-being. But you *can* do something about urinary incontinence.

Please note! Contact your doctor if you experience:

• Sudden urinary incontinence
• Blood in the urine • Pain in the bladder or urethra

FACTS ABOUT URINARY INCONTINENCE

Approx. 500,000 Danes suffer from some form of urinary incontinence, of which:

- 16% of all women aged 40–60 years
- 50% of all women over 75 years

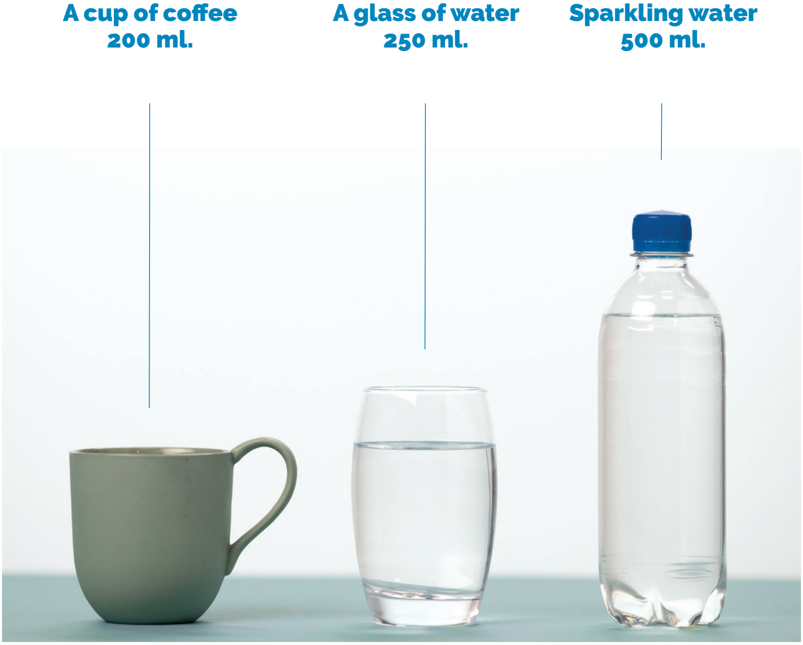
Causes of urinary incontinence include:

- Weak pelvic floor muscles
- Vaginal wall and/or uterine prolapse
- Menopause and consequential lack of female sex hormones
- Cystitis
- Cancer or abdominal surgery
- Diseases affecting bladder function, such as diabetes, dementia or stroke
- Coughing, caused by smoking, for example
- Too much or too little fluid intake
- Increased pressure on pelvic floor muscles and bladder due, for example, to constipation, lung disease with a chronic cough, or obesity

What you can do

1. Pay attention to your drinking habits

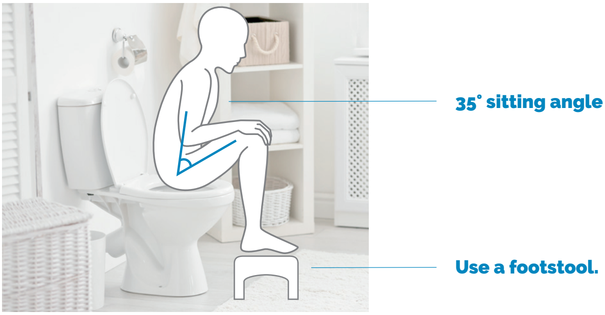
The Danish Health Authority recommends that the elderly drink approximately one-and-a-half litres of fluids a day. You should increase your fluids intake in hot weather or if you are physically active. Fluid is everything you drink, including water, coffee, tea, juice, alcohol, etc. If you drink more than you need, go to the toilet more often. If you drink too little, your bladder may become irritated by the concentrated urine and you may feel an urge to urinate more often. The colour of your urine should not be too dark or too light. We recommend that you spread your fluid intake evenly over the day. For example, drinking a lot in the evening may mean having to make trips to the toilet at night.



2. Pay attention to your toilet habits

It is essential that you do not ‘teach’ your bladder to hold in large - or even small amount - of urine. A normal bladder can hold approx. 2.5 to 4 dl urine. If you drink approx. one and a half litres a day, urinating approx. every 3 to 4 hours is normal. Do not push the urine out using your abdominal muscles, let it flow by itself. To empty the bladder properly, it is important that you sit properly and that you give yourself enough time to fully empty your bladder.

If you feel that you have not emptied your bladder completely after going to the toilet, it is a good idea to sit down again and check if there is more.



Correct sitting position on the toilet

3. Avoid constipation

If you are constipated and push when you try to empty your bowel, you risk stretching and weakening your pelvic floor muscles. Weak pelvic floor muscles may cause urinary incontinence.

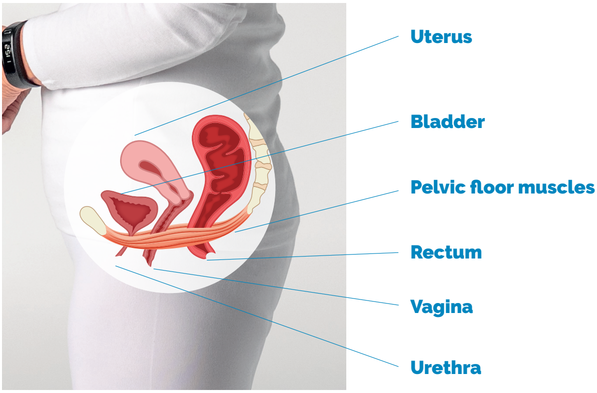
Sufficient exercise, fibre and fluid intake will keep your bowels regular and may prevent constipation. Having a bowel movement twice a day or every other day is something that varies from person to person. You should get rid of faeces at least twice a week. The most important thing is to have regular bowel movements. Your stools should preferably be solid.

4. Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

Pelvic floor exercises or squeezing exercises can prevent urinary incontinence in both men and women. Training your pelvic floor helps you to better control when you want to let go of water. You train your pelvic floor muscles by squeezing the muscles around your rectal opening, vagina, and urethra. The better part of your pelvic floor area is situated between your coccyx and rectum, so concentrate on closing your rectum – if you do so, EVERYTHING will close.

Try holding the squeeze for 6 to 8 second, although this may prove difficult at the beginning of a workout if your muscles are weak or slack. Also remember to take breaks between the squeezes so that your muscles do not become sore.

You may have difficulty activating your pelvic floor properly. For this reason, it is a good idea to seek help from your doctor and/or a specially trained physiotherapist, who can help you train your pelvic floor muscles properly. It is essential that you continue to train your pelvic floor muscles once you have learned how to do so.



Cross-section of a female abdomen. Pelvic floor muscles are rooted in the abdomen and support the uterus, bladder, urethra, vagina, and rectum.
Strong pelvic floor muscles are key to preventing urinary incontinence.

Where to get help

Talk to your doctor or check whether your local council provides support for citizens with incontinence.

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Health for all ♥ + ●