

## Is your bladder and bowel doing its job properly?

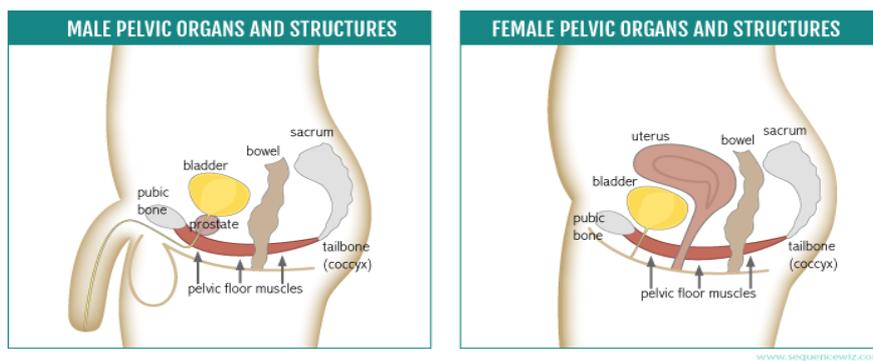
There are millions of people living in the UK, and it is estimated that between 4-6 million men and women have problems with their bladders and bowels, (and they're just the ones we know about). But to be able to know when it's going wrong, we need first to understand how it should be working.



***We all have a bladder and a bowel but do you know how yours works?***

There are many reasons why the bladder and bowel do not function as you would like it to, and these will be covered in future topics, but there are also simple things that you can do, to ensure that it is working the best that it can.

Men and Women have many of the same organs such as Bladder, Bowel and *PELVIC FLOOR*, but other than the obvious difference between men and women, men also have a prostate gland and this is very important in the functioning of the bladder as men age.



The pelvic floor muscle is needed to help control and support both your bladder and bowels and you need to be able to relax the muscle to allow the urine or stools to pass. However, if the muscles are weak, this can sometimes happen when you don't want it to.

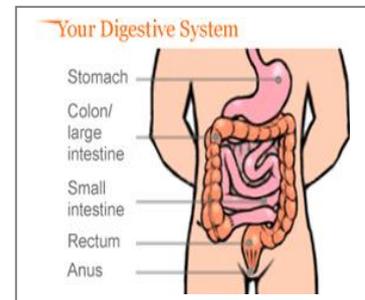
***“How often should I be passing urine?”***

The bladder is a muscle the pelvis. As urine passes the bladder, the bladder begins to fill and sends messages to the brain to tell you that you need to pass urine. You should be able to ignore these messages and the bladder continues to fill. As the bladder becomes fuller, the messages come closer together and stronger, which lets you know that you need to find a toilet. However, sometimes that bladder will not wait and will empty itself. It is important to remember though that as the bladder fills, it needs a strong pelvic floor to support it.

The bladder has a general maximum capacity of 4-600mls which means a normal pattern of passing urine every 3-4 hours would result in passing urine 4-6 times, which can include once at night. But it is important to remember that this will vary depending on your fluid intake. If you drink more, you should expect to pass urine more frequently but still good volumes.

Bladder function is also affected by the bowel as the pelvic organs are all close together. If the bowel is full it can press on the bladder giving you the urge to pass urine.

The bowel is made up of the LARGE INTESTINE which breaks down the food and absorbs nutrients that the body needs, and the SMALL INTESTINE where the excess water is absorbed to result in a firm stool. The length of time (called transit time) that it takes for food to pass out through the anus from the time of eating varies but is generally 24-44 hours. At the end of the small intestine is the rectum where the faeces are stored. As the rectum fills, messages are sent to the brain to tell you that you need to open your bowels. Like the bladder, you should be able to delay this from happening. While faeces are stored in the rectum, water continues to be absorbed. Therefore, ignoring the need to empty your bowel in addition to a longer transit time, increases the risk of constipation.



### ***“How do I know if I’m constipated?”***

Because the transit time varies from person to person, so does what is classed as normal for bowel movements. Anything from 3 times a day to 3 times a week without straining and passing a formed, soft stool is OK.

Here are a few things that you can do to keep your bladder and bowel healthy:

- ❖ Ensure a good fluid intake – aiming for 2 litres per day
  - Limit caffeine
- ❖ Ensure you have regular soft bowel movements
  - Eat a diet high in fibre. Most recent guidance suggests 30g per day
- ❖ Regular pelvic floor exercises
- ❖ Check the side effects of any medication
- ❖ Exercise regularly

As a nurse who has 15 years’ experience in the field of continence promotion, I can offer many treatment options in addition to the suggestions above.

If you feel that your bladder and/or bowel is not working the way you would like it too, please get in touch.

Follow me on Twitter and Facebook  
@yourcontinence or join the Facebook group  
‘Talk Taboo with Sue’

### ***More articles in the coming weeks on:***

- ❖ ***Types of urinary incontinence***
- ❖ ***Prostate and the bladder***
- ❖ ***How to manage the bowel***

### ***When to seek help:***

- ❖ Experiencing pain, bleeding and discomfort
- ❖ Difficulty in emptying the bladder and/or bowel
- ❖ Chronic constipation that is not resolved with diet and fluids
- ❖ Urinary or faecal