



## UROLOGY ASSOCIATES OF FREDERICKSBURG

### Five Simple Rules for Bladder Health

Are you visiting the urologist for urinary tract infections, urine leakage (incontinence) or a painful bladder? If so, the following five simple rules will help you to control your symptoms and ensure a healthy bladder.

1. **Drink Water:** Drinking an adequate amount of fluids may reduce the likelihood of developing urinary tract infections. Also, the concentrated urine formed when you starve yourself for fluids may cause your bladder pain to become worse. Even if you have urine leakage, severely limiting the amounts of fluids you drink is not advisable.
  - The recommended daily allowance of fluids is  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce per pound of body weight. Ask your doctor to tell you how much fluids you should take if you are not sure. Generally, this means you should *drink 6 to 8 glasses* of liquids a day. If you drink less than 6 to 8 glasses each day, you should gradually increase your fluid intake by adding a  $\frac{1}{2}$  glass of liquid each week. Drink these extra fluids *between meals*, this will help to spread your liquids and avoid the risk of worsening bladder leakage or discomfort.
2. **Avoid or reduce your intake of foods or drinks that irritate the bladder:** Certain drinks and foods may irritate your bladder, worsening the pain or urine loss you are experiencing. Eliminate these products one at a time to see how it affects your bladder.
  - Caffeine almost always acts as a bladder irritant. Coffee, tea, carbonated drinks, and chocolate contain caffeine. At first, you may want to switch to decaffeinated coffee, tea, or soft drinks and see if this eases your symptoms. If you have a painful bladder and this is not sufficient, you may wish to eliminate these things from your diet or try a low acid decaffeinated coffee or tea. Gourmet coffee shops often sell these products.
  - Aspartame (the sweetener in Equal and similar products) may irritate your bladder. This product is often used in diet soft drinks and is sold in packets with blue paper.
3. **Regulate your bowel habits and correct constipation:** Bowel irregularity and constipation in particular, can increase your risk for urinary tract infections and for urine loss or poor bladder emptying. Try the three simple steps listed

below to regulate your bowel habits. If these strategies do not work for you, contact your doctor and ask for further advice about bowel regularity.

- Drink enough fluids. See Rule 1 for details.
- Eat a diet rich in fiber. Common dietary sources for fiber include: whole beans, whole grain cereals or breads, fresh fruits and vegetables. If constipation is a particular problem for you try the following recipe:
  - i. Mix 1 cup of unprocessed wheat bran, 1 cup of applesauce and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of prune juice and refrigerate.
  - ii. Take 2 Tablespoons each day with a large glass of water or juice, allow 1 week for bowel movements to become soft and regular.
  - iii. If bowel movements remain dry and difficult to pass, increase by 1-2 Tablespoons per week, up to 8 Tablespoons.
- Exercise daily. Strenuous exercises are not needed; a leisurely walk will promote bowel regularity better than an exhausting run.

4. **Maintain a regular, but flexible schedule for urination:** Regular urination is necessary, particularly when you take medications designed to help you control your bladder, or when you are unable to completely empty your bladder of urine.

- You should empty your bladder approximately every 2 to 4 hours. Holding urine for long periods of time, more than 5 hours or so, during the day can over-stretch your bladder promoting poor bladder emptying and increasing frequency of urine later on.
- When you take anticholinergic medication i.e. Ditropan, Levsin, or Probanthine, you must empty your bladder on a regular basis. Remember that these medications are only effective if you empty the bladder before a premature contraction causes urine loss.
- If your doctor tells you that you have urge or mixed stress and urge incontinence, ask your doctor about a bladder retraining schedule.
- If you have a painful bladder, ask your doctor whether holding your urine for increasing periods of time is advisable.

5. **Stop smoking—NOW!** Tobacco irritates the bladder and produces coughing. These effects make urine leakage worse. The kidneys filter out some of the worst byproducts from the smoke, and these materials increase your risk of bladder cancer. The irritating effects of tobacco irritate the bladder making bladder related pain worse. The message is clear- to promote bladder health, stop smoking *now*!

