



Incomplete emptying of the bladder

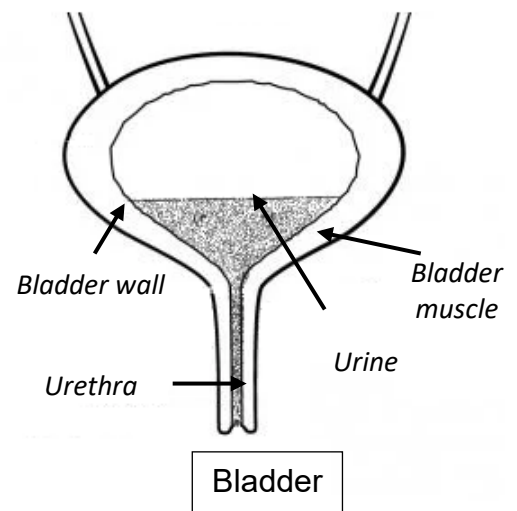
This leaflet tells you about things you can do to help you to fully empty your bladder. If you have any questions, please speak to your physiotherapist.

What is incomplete emptying of the bladder?

The bladder should hold **about 400-600ml of urine** when full. After you go to the toilet to pass urine (pee), only 80ml or less stays in the bladder. If there is more than this, then the bladder is not completely empty. This can cause problems and symptoms. It can happen to both men and women.

What are the symptoms?

- You feel that you have **not emptied** your bladder, or **need to 'go again'**
- You need to **go more often** (urinary frequency)
- You feel urgency to urinate (you **need to go 'right now'**)
- You have a **slow stream** of urine, or it **stops and starts**
- You **dribble urine after you have finished on the toilet**
- You **often need to get up in the night** to pass urine
- You **leak urine** (incontinence)
- Your lower belly is uncomfortable
- You feel **burning or stinging** when you pass urine, like having a 'water infection'

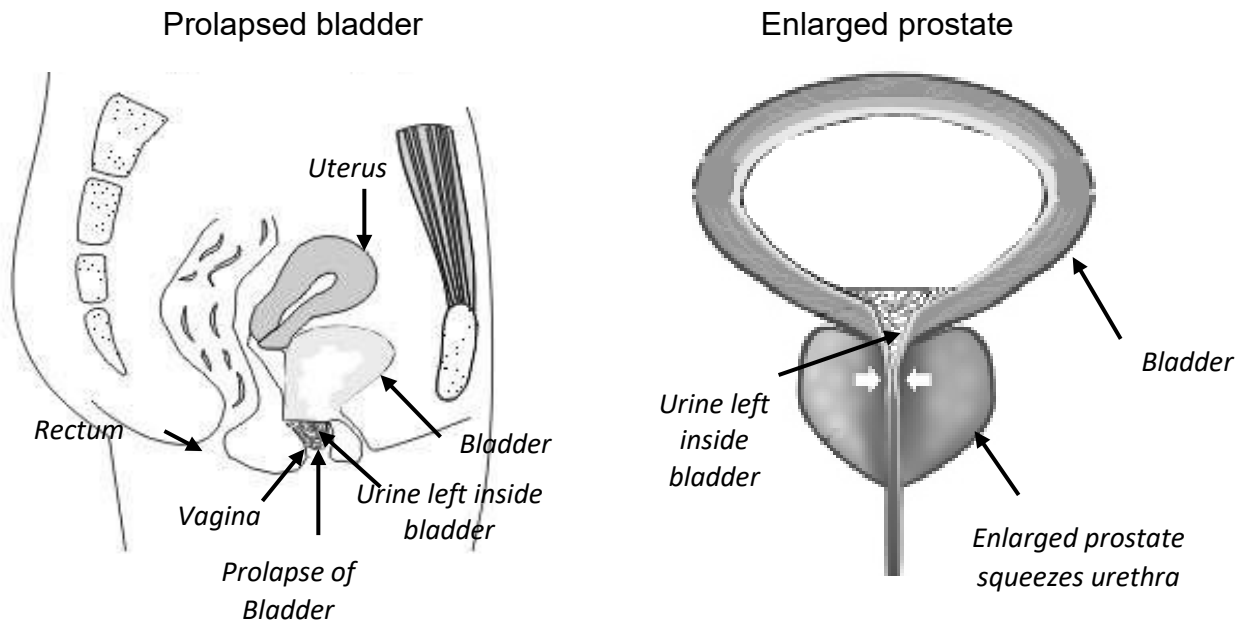


Why doesn't my bladder empty completely?

There are many different causes, such as:

- 'Tense' or 'tight' pelvic floor muscles (the group of muscles that runs from your pubic bone to your tailbone and supports your pelvic organs).
- Pelvic floor muscles can become tense if:
 - you constantly "hold on", or
 - you have pain or previous surgery in the area, or
 - you are generally stressed
- Lower back pain – especially previous disc problems.
- Long-term difficulty opening your bowels (constipation).
- Prolapse ('falling down') of the uterus (womb) or bladder in women.
- Over sensitive (overactive) bladder.

- The muscle inside the bladder isn't working properly (poor bladder contractility).
- An enlarged prostate in men. This can squeeze the tube the urine comes out through.



What can I do to help empty my bladder?

Here are a few tips to help you to **empty your bladder as fully as possible**. These will **reduce**:

- **The number of times** you need to pass urine, and
- **The chances of getting an infection** in your bladder.

General tips:

- Always make sure you **sit down properly** on the toilet – do not 'hover' over the seat. Men also empty their bladders more completely if they sit down to urinate instead of standing up.
- Make sure your **feet are on the floor** – if the toilet is too high, put a foot stool underneath your feet.
- Rest your hands on your knees.
- Relax your abdomen and breathe into your lower tummy.

Then try these techniques:

1. Double-voiding:

When you have finished urinating:

- Rock backwards and forwards or side to side
- Stand up and 'jiggle around' or walk around the bathroom for a few seconds
- Now **sit down and try to pass urine again**

2. Bladder percussion/tapping:

- Use your fingers to tap firmly over your bladder (just above your pubic bone). This can help the bladder muscle to contract and allow more urine to flow.

3. Stimulation

- Massage your lower abdomen and apply gentle pressure there
- Massage your inner thighs
- Pull on your pubic hair

Learn to relax your pelvic floor muscles. This will also help you to empty your bladder more completely.

How do I relax my pelvic floor muscles?

Lie down with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed.

Watch your stomach rise and fall as you breathe. Then follow these steps:

1. **Breathe in.** Put your hands on your stomach so you can feel your stomach rise. **Hold your breath for 4 or 5 seconds.** Keep your shoulders relaxed and your ribcage soft.
2. While you are holding your breath, **relax your tummy downwards and relax your pelvic floor muscles** downwards towards your feet. Imagine your pelvis widening or a rosebud opening to help you. Continue for a few seconds, focusing on letting the muscles soften. Remember that this is **not** an active push; you are trying to 'let go' of all the muscles.
3. Then **'sigh'** the breath out without any effort, and with an open mouth (like steaming up a window).

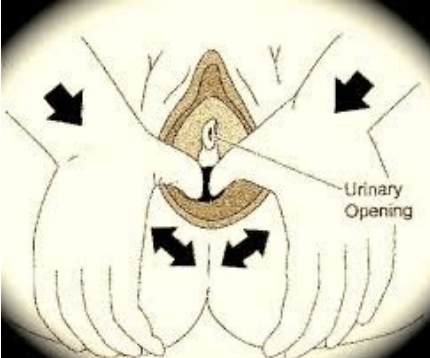
At the start you will need to really concentrate on this, and to practice it. Once you can do it, add it into your pelvic floor muscle training. Do a couple of relaxation exercises before you start each strengthening exercise session. **Relax your pelvic floor muscles on the in-breath, and contract them on the out-breath.** Remember to relax for a few seconds in between each contraction.

Other helpful tips:

Perineal massage can be helpful in stretching out any scar tissue from previous surgery or from stitches during childbirth, but is also helpful for relaxing the pelvic floor muscles even if you have not had any surgery in this area. The perineum is the area between the anus and the vagina in women, or between the anus and the scrotum in men.

Instructions for perineal massage:

- Wash your hands and keep fingernails short.
- It can be helpful to do it after a shower or bath.
- Relax in a private place and sit with your knees bent in an upright position, leaning on some pillows for back support if you like.
- Use a lubricant such as vitamin E oil or a lubricant suitable for intimate areas. Avoid nut based oils if you have an allergy.
- The area will become more relaxed the more you practice.

| Women | Men |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place lubricated thumbs or thumb 1 to 1.5 inches inside the vagina. • Press down towards the anus and to each side, hold for about 1-2 minutes until you feel a slight stretching. • Then sweep your thumbs out to the sides and back. • This should not hurt.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a lubricated finger on the perineum. • Massage the area between the scrotum and anus gently but firmly. You can go in any direction that feels comfortable to you. • This should not hurt. |

There are no known risks, but you should not massage your perineum if you have vaginal thrush (candida), genital herpes or any other infection in this area. If you think you may have any of these conditions then please consult your GP.

Helpful websites

Bladder and Bowel UK <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/>

Bladder Health UK <http://bladderhealthuk.org/>

POGP <https://pogp.csp.org.uk/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Next review due: June 2026