

KNOWLEDGE BROCHURE SERIES

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Managing
Bowel & Bladder
Problems



shared solutions
knowledge resources

Don't let fear or embarrassment stop you from discussing bladder or bowel issues. As many as 90% of people with multiple sclerosis experience bladder problems and 60% report bowel problems.^{1,2}

Bladder problems

The symptoms of bladder issues vary. Some of the more common symptoms include

- 6 **Urgency.** The feeling that you need to urinate immediately and can't "hold it"
- 6 **Incontinence.** Loss of bladder control
- 6 **Nocturia.** A frequent need to urinate during the night
- 6 **Hesitance.** Difficulty beginning urination
- 6 **Leaking.** Loss of bladder control, most often caused by an overfull bladder; often described as "leaking" or "dribbling"
- 6 **Incomplete urination.** Inadequate emptying of the bladder; you may or may not have the feeling after urination that you "still have to go." Urine remains in the bladder after urination
- 6 **Weak stream.** A weak or thin flow during urination

For your own comfort and quality of life, bladder symptoms should be treated by a physician. Various treatments are available, ranging from medications to self-catheterization. By addressing the problem early, it's possible to minimize bladder problems.³



Here are 3 basic rules for healthy bowels—whether you're suffering from constipation or bowel incontinence⁷:

1. **Drink up.** Fluid intake can affect bowel movements, and insufficient fluid intake may significantly contribute to constipation.
2. **Fuel up with fiber.** Eat plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grain cereals and bread and use fiber supplements if needed.
3. **Listen to your doctor.** If he or she recommends a stool softener, use it.

If you're already following these 3 rules and are still having problems, talk to your doctor or nurse. He or she can work with you to identify the root of your problem and find solutions. Various medications are available including enemas, suppositories, and laxatives and techniques such as biofeedback (the learned control of physiological functions of the body) can help.

Here are a few tips to consider:

- 6 **Eat, drink, and be aware.** Coffee, carbonated drinks, tea, sweeteners, chocolate, tomatoes, and spicy foods can decrease bladder control. Take note of your dietary habits to see what, if anything, is contributing to your problems⁴
- 6 **Stagger your fluid intake.** Your body needs 1.5 to 2 liters of fluid a day. Divide that up during the day to best suit your bathroom needs⁵
- 6 **Slim down.** If you are moderately overweight, shedding excess pounds could help reduce incontinence⁶



Bowel problems

As any sufferer knows, bowel issues can be a major source of discomfort. But there are management strategies to help limit their effects.



Want to know more?

Visit the **National Multiple Sclerosis Society** Web site at www.nmss.org. Among a wealth of other information they have articles regarding bladder and bowel issues. You can also search for information at

About.com

msaa.com (Multiple Sclerosis Association of America)

msfocus.org (MS Foundation)

WebMD.com

Know there's someone to turn to

While there's no substitute for medical advice from your doctor, **Shared Solutions**[®] is here to help if you have questions about MS-related issues or need therapy support. Just give us a call at **1-800-887-8100**.

You can also visit www.sharedsolutions.com for information about MS and lifestyle management. We're here to help those living with MS live better with support, knowledge, and answers.





References:

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