

## Voiding Dysfunction

Voiding dysfunction, or difficulty emptying your bladder, can be very distressing. You may question why a bodily function that you once took for granted is not working properly. Many people overcome voiding dysfunction. Your healthcare provider can help you determine the cause of your voiding dysfunction and what you can do to improve it.

### Causes:

- *Overactive Pelvic Floor Muscle Dysfunction:* The pelvic floor muscles are the muscles that are responsible for voluntary control over bladder, bowel and sexual function. These muscles need to relax in order for the bladder to empty. These muscles can become tense in response to stress, pain, anxiety, habit and more. A pelvic physical therapist can help you learn how to relax these muscles.
- *Bladder Muscle (Detrusor) Dysfunction:* The bladder, in addition to being a storage space for urine, is also a muscle that must contract in order to empty the bladder. Sometimes this muscle, for various reasons, may contract weakly, or not at all, causing difficulty emptying the bladder.
- *Prolapse:* When the pelvic organs descend towards the vaginal canal, a physical blockage can occur.
- *Medical conditions:* Certain neurological conditions and Diabetes can cause voiding dysfunction as well. These causes can vary in severity. Sometimes these causes occur simultaneously.

### Tips to Help Empty Your Bladder:

- *Sit comfortably.* While squatting or hovering over public toilets may be more sanitary, it makes it difficult to relax your pelvic floor muscles. Try lining the seat with paper or bring a foldable plastic seat cover with you.
- *Relax and take your time.* Be patient with yourself to help your muscles relax and to allow your bladder to empty fully. Rushing is not conducive to muscle relaxation or bladder emptying.
- *Avoid straining.* While you may feel the need to push forcefully in order to empty your bladder, this can sometimes cause the pelvic floor muscles to tighten, preventing bladder emptying. Also, this bypasses the body's natural mechanism for emptying, which may reinforce the voiding dysfunction in the long run.

- *Try changing your position on the toilet.* Try leaning forward or back. Try using a step stool or a “Squatty Potty” under your feet. Having your legs up in a squat-like position with your trunk leaning forward helps the pelvic floor to relax.
- *Try double voiding.* After urinating, stand up, bend at the waist and/ or bring your hips forward, back, and side to side and then sit back down. You may be able to urinate more. This can be especially helpful for women with prolapse.
- *Try stimulating your bladder muscle to contract using these methods:*
  - Gently tugging on your pubic hairs
  - Stroking your inner thigh or lower back area
  - Tapping firmly on the bladder just above your pubic bone 7-8 times
- *Try a bladder schedule.* Avoid prolonged periods between trips to the bathroom. This can lead to bladder over-stretching which can weaken the bladder muscle. Try voiding every 2-3 hours, even if you do not feel the need to urinate.
- *Stay hydrated.* Water makes us function better. Also, if you are avoiding drinking in order to avoid the discomfort of not being able to empty, you may not be producing enough urine to facilitate good bladder emptying. Furthermore, concentrated urine from dehydration irritates the bladder, making you feel like you need to urinate when your bladder is not actually full.
- *But don't overhydrate.* This can make symptoms worse as well. In order to figure out how much water you should be drinking daily, take your weight in pounds and divide that number in half. That number is how many ounces of water you should drink in a day. Divide that number by 8 and that is how many cups you should drink. Make sure to spread this amount over the course of the day and not to drink too much at once. Also, do not increase your water intake suddenly. For example, if you normally drink only 3 cups of water per day, do not suddenly drink 8 cups in a day. Add a cup every few days or so from your usual amount until you reach your desired amount.

We hope you find these tips useful. Make sure to follow up with your healthcare provider for proper diagnosis and treatment. Voiding dysfunction may be a sign of something more serious. Also, you may think that you are not emptying your bladder when you actually have a different type of bladder dysfunction. We are here to help.