

Supported Self-Management

How to manage Acute urinary symptoms

This video will talk about the urinary problems you may experience after treatment for prostate cancer.

Why might you get urinary problems?

You can get urinary problems as a side effect of treatment. This is because prostate cancer treatment can damage the nerves and muscles that control when you urinate (wee).

What are the common urinary side effects following Radiotherapy?

Radiation Cystitis

Radiotherapy may irritate the lining of your bladder. This can make you feel that you need urinate more often and have a burning sensation. You may notice the flow of your urine gets weaker.

It may help to **drink more water than usual** to help keep your urine dilute, but **avoid drinks that irritate the bladder (caffeine, fizzy drinks and alcohol)**. If the burning persists, your healthcare team may ask you for a sample of urine so they can check for infection.

These symptoms may begin to improve after treatment finishes. Some people may not experience symptoms until months or years after finishing treatment. Whilst others experience no symptoms at all. Symptoms usually settle within three – six months.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) that affects the bladder

Urine infections can occur after radiotherapy and you can be more likely to get a urine infection if you have an enlarged prostate and can't empty your bladder.

Symptoms may include

- A fever or high temperature
- Urinary frequency, including at night
- Difficult passing urine
- A burning sensation when passing urine
- Dark or cloudy urine
- Blood in the urine

Drinking plenty of fluids can help, but **avoid drinks that irritate the bladder (caffeine, fizzy drinks and alcohol)**.

If you are concerned, let your healthcare team know if you have any of these symptoms.

Urinary retention and flow

Urinary retention is when you have trouble emptying your bladder.

After radiotherapy or brachytherapy you can sometimes have scarring around the opening of the bladder or the urethra, which can cause the prostate to swell and block the urethra. Some patients can also experience urinary retention after surgery.

There are two types of retention:

1. Chronic urinary retention

Chronic urine retention is when you can urinate a little, but can't empty your bladder fully. Urinary flow may be weak, and you may notice urinary leakage at night, it usually happens over time.

Signs often include:

- leaking urine at night
- feeling that your abdomen (stomach area) is swollen
- feeling that you're not emptying your bladder fully
- a weak flow when you urinate.

2. Acute urinary retention

Acute urine retention is when you suddenly can't pass urine. If it's painful, it needs treating straight away.

If this happens, you will need to **attend your local emergency department**. You may need to have the urine drained from your bladder using a catheter.

What are the common urinary side effects following surgery?

Urinary urgency

Urinary urgency is when you experience sudden urges to urinate that can be hard to ignore. A small number of patients find they sometimes leak urine before they can reach the toilet - this is called urge incontinence.

Urge incontinence happens when the bladder muscles spasm and relax without your control, pushing urine out before you are ready.

There are things you can do that can help:

- **Avoid drinking caffeine, fizzy drinks and acidic foods or drinks**
- **Pelvic floor exercises**
- **Retrain your bladder**
- **Try not to rush to the toilet** as this can cause your muscles to relax and increase leakage

Urinary frequency

Urinary frequency is when you need to urinate all the time.

There are things you can do to help:

- **Avoid drinks that irritate the bladder (caffeine, fizzy drinks, alcohol)**

- **Pelvic floor exercises**
- **Reduce your fluid intake prior to bed**
- **Retrain your bladder**

If your urinary frequency is unmanageable, there are medication and treatment options available. You can discuss this with your healthcare team.

Urinary Incontinence

Urinary incontinence is the unintentional passing of urine, Urinary leakage for less than six months is called short-term urinary incontinence, and usually improves over time.

If you are struggling with long term urinary incontinence, discuss this with your healthcare team

What can help with leaking urine?

There are treatments and products available that can help, and there are things you can do to help yourself. Your treatment options will depend on how much urine you're leaking, and how recently you had your prostate cancer treatment.

Treatments and products available that can help include:

- **absorbent pads and pants**
- **pelvic floor muscle exercises**
- **urinary sheaths**
- **bed protectors and handheld urinals**
- **penile clamps**
- **Drink 1.5 – 2 litres of fluid a day**
- **Limit drinks that contain caffeine, fizzy drinks and alcohol**
- **Plan ahead before you go out**
- **Use a toilet card**
- **Retrain your bladder**
- **A catheter**
- **Medications to relax the muscles around the bladder or shrink the prostate**
- **Referral to pelvic floor physiotherapist**

If you still leak urine six to twelve months after surgery and pelvic floor muscle exercises haven't helped, there are treatments available that might help. Talk to your healthcare team about ones that are suitable for you.

Further Support

If you experience any blood in your urine, or have increasing difficulties in passing urine, please let your health care team know .

If you would like to discuss aspects of this video or have concerns please contact your healthcare team. Useful links can also be found in your handbook and via the link on your screen: [Urinary problems after prostate cancer treatment \(prostatecanceruk.org\)](https://www.prostatecanceruk.org)

Thank you