

# Your Journey with Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms (LUTS) for those with Female Urinary Organs



For more information scan this QR code or go to [myhealth.alberta.ca/female-luts-pathway](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/female-luts-pathway)

**Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) are problems that affect how you urinate (pee). These might include leaking urine, a sudden and frequent urge to urinate, a weak urine stream, pain during or after sex, leaking urine when you sneeze, cough, or exercise, or the feeling that your bladder is not completely empty after you finish.**

You play the most important role in your healthcare. This guide is created for people with female urinary organs. It will help you understand what to expect as you work with your healthcare team to manage and treat LUTS. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask your healthcare team.

## Before your appointment (Page 6)

- Write down how you feel, your symptoms, and any questions or concerns. Include things you find make your symptoms better or worse, and what you have tried before to help with your symptoms.
- Consider completing a [bladder diary](#) before you see your healthcare provider, or they may ask you to do one after your appointment.



## Visit your healthcare provider (Page 8)

- Consider bringing a family member or friend to support you.
- Share all of your symptoms and concerns. Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements.
- Your healthcare provider needs to hear from you and understand what matters to you.
- You will likely have a physical exam of your abdomen and an internal pelvic exam. You may also be asked to do a cough stress test to see if you leak urine.



## Get your tests (Page 11)

- You may be asked to give a urine sample and have blood work done. This will help your healthcare provider understand the health of your bladder and kidneys.
- Some patients may need to get a scan of their kidneys and bladder.
- It is important to talk with your healthcare team about what tests are right for you based on your age, symptoms, and treatment plans.



## Review your test results (Page 12)

- You may find your test results on MyHealth Records or MyChart.
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test and assessment results mean and how they will help your team and you decide what to do next.



## Review your treatment, management and prevention options (Page 13)

- After your healthcare provider determines what is causing your LUTS, you will work together on a treatment plan that may include physiotherapy or medical devices.
- You may be able to manage your symptoms with pelvic floor exercises, adjusting what you eat and drink, being active, changing your bathroom habits.
- Your healthcare provider may suggest specific medications based on your symptoms.
- Some patients may benefit from seeing a physiotherapist for pelvic floor exercises, although not all treatments are covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.



## Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral (Page 20)

- You may find your test results on MyHealth Records or MyChart.
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test and assessment results mean and how they will help your team and you decide what to do next.



## Start your treatment and watch your symptoms (Page 21)

- Take an active role in your treatment. If you have a change in symptoms or notice new symptoms, consider writing down what they are and the date, time, and what you were doing when they began.
- Make sure to tell your healthcare team right away or call 811 if you have pain, blood in your urine, a hard time urinating or emptying your bladder, post-menopausal bleeding, unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite, or night sweats.



## Keep taking care of yourself (Page 22)

- Keep taking care of your overall health.
- Look for other healthy lifestyle resources and supports.



Whole-person health

### Important Tips:

Need a family doctor?  
[ahs.ca/findaprovider](https://ahs.ca/findaprovider)

Need a translator?  
Let your healthcare provider know

Need health advice?  
Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and services in your community?  
Call 211 or visit [ab.211.ca](https://ab.211.ca)

## How to use this resource

The information provided in this resource is based on validated evidence from a variety of sources, including healthcare professionals in Alberta, peer-reviewed journals, current clinical guidelines, validated patient resources, and specialty care recommendations. It is intended as general health information and should not replace the clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare provider. This resource does not address the unique needs of individual patients. Always consult with your healthcare team and follow their recommendations for your specific care.

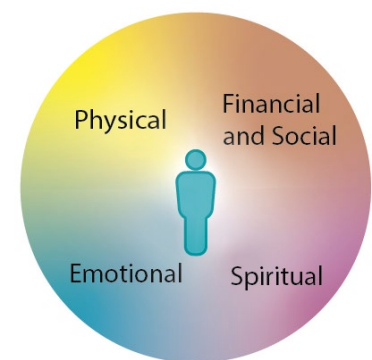
These pages are for you to use as needed. You can look through all of them at once or just the ones that help you now. Feel free to come back to the resource whenever you need it.

## Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare team better manage your health condition. It is drawn from the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare team.

- **Physical:** your specific health conditions and how well your body works
- **Financial and Social:** your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships
- **Spiritual:** your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose
- **Emotional:** how you think, feel, and cope with life events



**Whole-person health**

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare provider needs to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

**“What are the things in my life that are important to me?”**

**“What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?”**



Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare provider:

### **Physical**

“My symptoms are making it hard for me to do my job.”

“Because of urine leaks, it is hard for me to exercise like I want.”

“I have the uncomfortable feeling that I still need to pee after I just went.”

### **Financial and Social**

“I find myself avoiding activities that are important to me because I’m scared I’ll have an accident in public.”

“I need my daughter with me as a translator.”

“I’m not sure how I will pay for my medications or pads this month.”

### **Emotional**

“I feel embarrassed about how I leak urine and have no one to talk to.”

“I have a lot of stress and I’m not sure how to manage it.”

“I am finding it difficult to manage how I am feeling during the day, as I am having to wake up so many times in the night to pee.”

“I am not able to enjoy being intimate because it is painful.”

### **Spiritual**

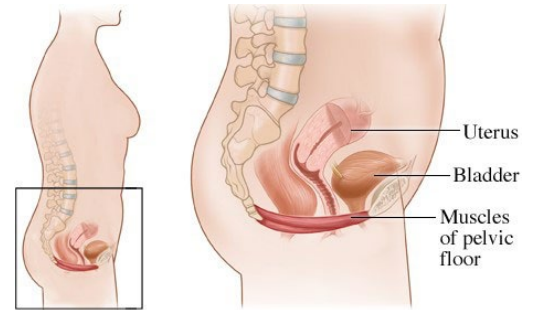
“It’s important that I follow traditional healing practices.”

“It’s important that my religious practice of fasting is respected and brought into my care.”

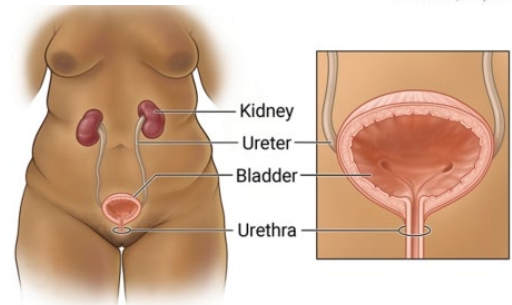
“It is important in my culture to be clean. My symptoms make it hard for me to feel this way.”

## What are lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS)?

Female lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) are common urination issues like leaking urine, frequent urges, weak stream, or incomplete emptying. These symptoms can impact your quality of life. LUTS is often linked to aging or menopause but can affect people of all ages. These symptoms can be hard to talk about. You and your healthcare team might use different words or you may feel uncomfortable with some words. Different ways to talk about peeing include pee, urinate (as well as urine and urination), voiding, or passing urine. You can choose whichever words you prefer. Your healthcare team is there to support you. If you're ever confused by words that your healthcare provider uses, ask them to explain what they mean.



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### Proper function of the urinary tract

Knowing how your bladder normally works can help you better understand your symptoms. As the bladder fills with urine, the bladder walls stretch until a person feels the need to relieve the pressure by releasing the urine. The urine is released when the pelvic muscles relax and the bladder wall tightens. The urine leaves the body through a single tube called the urethra.

### Common symptoms

Lower urinary tract symptoms are grouped together to help care providers understand why the symptoms are occurring. Symptom groups include:

Symptom group	Medical term	Symptom
Storage symptoms	Urgency	Sudden, strong, urge to pee
	Frequency	Needing to pee often
	Nocturia	Waking at night to pee
	Incontinence	Leaking urine
Peeing symptoms	Hesitancy	Difficulty starting to pee
	Voiding	Slow or interrupted stream, straining to pee, pain or burning when you pee
After peeing symptoms	Post-micturition	Dribbling after finishing
	Urinary retention	Feeling like your bladder isn't empty

It is important to note that you may have symptoms that cross several or all of these groups.

## Causes and risk factors

There are many different causes and risk factors that can contribute to LUTS, including certain health conditions, medications, and other risk factors.

### Health conditions:

- Menopause: hormonal changes, especially a loss of estrogen, can cause or worsen symptoms. This may include vaginal dryness, UTIs and pain during or after sex.
- Weak or damaged pelvic floor muscles, like from vaginal childbirth or past surgeries.
- Pelvic organ prolapse: the bladder or uterus dropping can block urine flow.
- Overactive bladder (OAB): when bladder muscles contract too often, you need to pee more frequently.
- Urinary tract infection (UTI): can make symptoms worse.
- Some chronic conditions, such as diabetes, kidney disease, and sleep apnea can affect bladder function.
- Confusion or not thinking clearly.
- Mental health conditions, especially depression.
- Conditions that cause nerve damage (like stroke or multiple sclerosis).
- Bladder cancer or bladder stones can cause symptoms like incontinence, urgency, burning, pain, and blood in the urine (pee can be light pink or bright red to maroon in colour).
- Constipation (hard stool) can bother the muscles that control urination.

### Medications:

Many different medications, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements, may cause bladder problems, including:

- Antidepressants
- Medications used to treat chronic conditions
- Medications to manage weight loss or breathing issues
- Muscle relaxants
- Cold and flu medications

Talk to your healthcare team about all the medicines you take because they might be able to switch you to one that doesn't cause bladder problems.

### Other risk factors:

- Prior pregnancies or childbirths
- Family history of cancer of the bladder, ovaries, uterus, or cervix
- Mobility issues that make it hard to get to the toilet on time
- Extra weight or weight gain (can put pressure on the bladder)
- Drinking too much or too little fluid
- Drinking or using alcohol, caffeine (like coffee, chocolate, tea), and soda pop or other fizzy drinks
- Emotional stress



- Smoking
- History of traumatic events including physical, mental, and sexual trauma.

Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) can have a big impact on your quality of life. These symptoms, like leaking urine, needing to urinate often, or waking up during the night to urinate (nocturia), can make everyday activities harder. Here are some ways LUTS might affect your life:

- **Sleep disruptions:** If you wake up multiple times during the night to urinate, it can affect how well you sleep. Poor sleep may make you feel tired and less focused during the day.
- **Embarrassment or stress:** Problems like leaking urine (incontinence) or needing to rush to the bathroom can be stressful or embarrassing, especially in public or social situations. This can lead to feelings of frustration or anxiety.
- **Limits on activities:** Frequent bathroom trips or worrying about accidents can make it harder to enjoy activities you used to like, such as exercising, traveling, or going out with friends and family.
- **Difficulty with work or daily tasks:** Constantly needing to go to the bathroom can make it harder to focus at work or finish everyday tasks, like cooking or running errands.
- **Impact on relationships:** LUTS can also affect your relationships, as it may be difficult to talk about these issues, impact intimacy, or cause stress with your partner or loved ones.
- **Cost:** Needing to buy absorbent products or do more laundry due to urine leakage can cause financial strain.

## Before your appointment

Everyone will have their own unique journey with LUTS. How you move through your journey, the number of visits with your healthcare team, the steps you will take, and the order you take them in will depend on your individual needs and will be decided in partnership with your healthcare team.

You don't have to deal with LUTS on your own. Talking to your healthcare provider can help you find ways to manage the symptoms and improve your quality of life. Always follow the specific recommendations from your healthcare team.

Here are a few tips to help you get ready for your appointment with your healthcare provider:

- If you feel uncomfortable sharing the reason for your appointment with staff when you call to book, you can always say "it's personal" and share details about the reason with your healthcare provider during the visit.

- Consider using a [symptom tracker](#) to write down important information to share with your healthcare team about your symptoms. This can help you remember what symptoms you're feeling, when they started, how often they happen, and what makes them better or worse.
- A [bladder diary](#) is a tool that your healthcare team can use to figure out if you are having trouble urinating and, if there is a problem, how the problem may be treated.
- Write down a list of your questions and concerns. When you're done, read your list and mark the most important things.
- Make a list of the prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines you use, including any vitamins, herbs, creams, ointments, and supplements.
- Ask someone you trust to go with you to your appointment. They can help you ask questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations. If you would like, they can also be in the room with you during a pelvic or vaginal exam (if you need one).



## Helpful tools and resources

- A [bladder diary](#) can be very helpful.
- **Use a symptom tracker:** <https://hqca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HQCA-Symptom-Tracker-March-23-2022.pdf>[hqca.ca/symptom-tracker](https://hqca.ca/symptom-tracker) (Health Quality Alberta)
- To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or see the Alberta Health Services **My Care Conversations app** ([ahs.ca/careapp](https://ahs.ca/careapp)) website for more information about recording your conversation with your healthcare provider.



### Healthcare provider's assessment

When you visit your healthcare provider for help with lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS), they will review your history of symptoms and what tends to make your symptoms better and worse. They may ask how often, how long, and how severe your symptoms are. They may also ask how your symptoms impact the things you do every day like taking care of yourself, your job, your hobbies, and your sleep.

Your healthcare provider will consider many things when working with you to understand why you are having LUTS, including your personal habits, your medical history including your mental health, and your family history.

Your healthcare provider may also do the following to better understand your symptoms and how they're affecting you:

#### Examination of your pelvis and abdomen

- During this exam, your healthcare provider will check for things that might be causing LUTS, like a mass, stool (poop), fistula (a hole that forms in the wall of the vagina and opens into the urinary tract), or pelvic organ prolapse.
- Your provider will check to see if you have any skin irritation or vaginal discharge.
- Your provider will also check your pelvic floor muscle strength and function.

How a pelvic exam is done:

- Your exam will be done in a private room.
- You will be asked to remove your clothes from the waist down (in private) and will be provided with a gown or sheet to cover yourself.
- You will lie on your back on an exam table with your feet on footrests.
- Your provider will put on gloves and insert one or two fingers into your vagina. They will rest their other hand on your lower belly. This lets your provider feel your pelvic organs. You may feel some pressure when this is done.

#### It's your right

Before a pelvic exam starts, you may be offered a chaperone like a nurse or the support person who is at the appointment with you. If a chaperone is not offered and you would like to have one, please let your healthcare provider know.

#### **You have a right to ask.**

If you feel uncomfortable or are in pain at any point during an exam, you always have the right to ask the provider to stop.

Even though LUTS problems are very common, many people find them difficult to talk about with others. Your healthcare provider understands that these problems can be hard to talk about, and they are there to support you.



- Your provider may need to use a speculum (an instrument inserted into your vagina) to complete this exam.
- In some cases, your provider may put one gloved finger into your rectum and one into your vagina, to help check your pelvic organs.
- Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if there is anything they can do to help you feel more comfortable during the exam.

### Cough stress test

Your healthcare provider will ask you to cough to see if any urine leaks out. Usually, this test is done while you lie on your back with your knees and hips bent. Sometimes, your provider will ask you to stand. You need a comfortably full bladder for this test.

### Neurological exam

Your healthcare provider may ask you some questions and do an exam to learn if any nervous system (brain or nerve) issues might be causing your symptoms.

### What should I watch for (symptoms of concern)?

Some symptoms can be a sign that something else is going on that needs attention or treatment right away. If you have any of these symptoms, make sure to tell your healthcare team right away or call Health Link at 811:

- Symptoms of urinary tract infection (like fever and chills, pain in your lower back and pelvis, and generally feeling unwell)
- Blood in urine can be caused by various things, but you should always see your healthcare provider if you notice this as it needs to be investigated.
- New or worsening lower back, belly, or pelvic pain
- Having a hard time urinating or feeling like your bladder doesn't empty fully when you urinate
- Post-menopausal bleeding (having a period or vaginal bleeding 12 months after your regular periods have stopped)
- Unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite, and night sweats
- Unexplained mass or lump on abdomen or pelvis

### What should I share with my healthcare provider?

- What impact are these symptoms having on things that are important to you, like your job, hobbies and interests, and relationships?

What activities make your symptoms worse?

- What has worked for you in the past to manage your symptoms (such as using pads or making changes to what you eat, drink, and do)?
- What types of things help you work better with your healthcare team? What do you expect and need from the relationship with your healthcare provider?

There are many conditions that may contribute to LUTS (like diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and conditions that affect the brain). Talking with your healthcare provider about your overall health is important. This will help them find and manage any other conditions which may help with your lower urinary tract symptoms.

### **There are lots of things in your life that can impact your ability to manage your health, like:**

- Problems with money, housing, and access to transportation
- Alcohol or drug use
- Not enough support or help
- Childhood experiences

It's important to talk about these things with your healthcare provider because they all play a role in your health and well-being.

### **You are the most important part of your healthcare team.**

If you don't understand what your healthcare team is telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest. You might say:

**"This is new to me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"**

**"It sounded like you said that I should... Did I understand that correctly?"**

**"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"**



## **Helpful tools and resources**

- Making the most of your appointment:  
[myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888)
- Working with your healthcare team: [hqa.ca/info](https://hqa.ca/info) (Health Quality Alberta)



Here's an explanation of some tests your healthcare provider might use to check for causes of lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS):

### Urinalysis:

- A urinalysis is a test where you provide a sample of your pee. The sample is checked for things like infection, blood, or other things that could be causing problems with your bladder or kidneys.

### Blood test:

- A blood test to check your creatinine will help your healthcare team see how well your kidneys are working to filter waste. If your kidneys aren't working properly, it could be because of LUTS.

### Kidney and bladder ultrasound with post-void residual measurement (PVR):

- Not everyone will need an ultrasound. An ultrasound uses sound waves to create pictures of your kidneys and bladder. Your healthcare team may recommend this test to check for problems that could be affecting your urinary system.
- This test is not usually done in your healthcare provider's office, as special equipment and supplies are needed.
- You will need a full bladder for this test. A full bladder means you will feel the urge to urinate, but you should not be too uncomfortable. The clinic where you are having the ultrasound done will give you instructions. It is important to follow these instructions so that the test can be completed when you are there.
- Your provider will scan your full bladder to see how much urine is in it.
- You will then be asked to go to the bathroom to empty your bladder as much as you can.
- Your bladder is scanned again after you return from the bathroom to see how much urine you passed and how much urine remains in the bladder. This amount is called the post-void residual.

**If the cause of your symptoms is still unclear after you have these tests, you may need more tests.**





## Review your test results

It is important to know what your test results are and what they mean for you. Take time to discuss your results with your healthcare provider. Medical terms can be hard to understand. And even common words like “positive” or “negative” might mean something different for medical tests. Ask your healthcare provider for explanations and examples to make sure you fully understand.

### You might ask:

- “What does this mean for me?”
- “Is there a current concern? If so, what is it?”



### It's important to talk to your healthcare provider right away if you:

- notice blood in your urine
- cannot urinate at all
- notice a mass or lump in your lower abdomen or pelvis



## Helpful tools and resources

You may find some of your results and health information using secure online tools:

### **MyHealth Records**

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at [myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords).

### **MyChart**

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Learn more at [ahs.ca/mychart](https://ahs.ca/mychart).





## Review your treatment, management and prevention options

Managing lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) requires a personalized approach based on the type and severity of your symptoms. While specific treatments are available for each type of symptom, making lifestyle and behaviour changes is important for everyone when appropriate. Here is some information about things that may help.

### Behavioural training

#### Pelvic floor physiotherapy

- Pelvic floor physiotherapy focuses on strengthening or relaxing the muscles of the pelvic floor. This can improve bladder control, reduce urgency, and help with other lower urinary tract symptoms. Pelvic floor physiotherapy will assess and make recommendations on how best to manage your symptoms, which may include some of the following.

#### Pelvic floor muscle training

- Many people need help learning how to do pelvic floor muscle training properly. Seeing a pelvic floor physiotherapist is a great way to get the support you need. Not all pelvic floor physiotherapy treatments are covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan, so there may be extra costs involved.
  - You can make an appointment for yourself at a private pelvic floor physiotherapy clinic. If you need help finding a clinic, the AHS Rehabilitation Advice Line can help you find options near you. Call the AHS Rehabilitation Advice Line at 1-833-379-0563 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.).
  - You can also search for pelvic floor physiotherapy resources near you using the drop-down search function on the Adult Community Rehabilitation website: [ahs.ca/communityrehab](https://ahs.ca/communityrehab)
  - In Alberta, you can also attend free pelvic health physiotherapy webinars: [myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/Pelvic-Health-Physiotherapy-Webinars.aspx](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/Pelvic-Health-Physiotherapy-Webinars.aspx)
- How to do pelvic floor exercises (Kegel exercises):
  1. Start by sitting or lying down. Keep your knees slightly apart. Relax. (Once you are comfortable with the exercises, you can try doing them while standing.)
  2. Find your pelvic muscles by pretending you are trying to hold in your urine and squeezing those muscles. Make sure you are not tightening your stomach or buttocks.

#### Recently given birth?

**The earlier you access care, the better.**

If you develop incontinence after a vaginal delivery, early access to care often helps improve outcomes and prevent it from getting worse.

Pelvic floor physiotherapy and daily pelvic floor exercises are the best treatment.



3. You can make sure you have the right muscles by inserting your finger into your vagina while doing the exercise to feel the muscle tightening then relaxing around your finger.
  4. Squeeze the muscles. Hold the squeeze for 5 to 10 seconds while breathing normally, then completely relax for a full 10 seconds.
  5. Repeat 12 to 20 times.
- Your pelvic muscles will only stay strong by exercising them regularly. Ask your pelvic floor physiotherapist how often you should be doing these exercises. It can take several months for you to see ongoing benefit, but you could see results after 3 months of daily exercises. You can test to see if your pelvic floor muscles are getting stronger by trying to stop the flow of urine, but **only do this as a test, never as an exercise.**

If you have any pain while doing these exercises, stop and talk with your healthcare provider. Sometimes, if your pelvic floor muscles are too tight, doing these exercises can cause more problems.

## Biofeedback

- This is a technique for learning to control a body function that is not normally something you think about controlling.
- Biofeedback uses a machine to record muscle contractions and turns it into a visual so you can see. For lower urinary tract symptoms, it can be used to teach you how to do pelvic floor muscle exercises correctly.
- It is usually done by a healthcare provider in a healthcare setting, but you can buy or rent a machine for your home.
- Biofeedback pelvic floor devices, such as PeriFit, Elivie Trainer, and kGoal are great devices to help work on pelvic floor strength and relaxation on your own at home.
- Alternatives to biofeedback: Vaginal cones or weights are inserted into the vagina and held in place by squeezing your pelvic muscles, increasing the weight as tolerated.
- When considering vaginal cones or weights, look for a product that offers 5 different weights so that you can increase your device's weight over time. **These devices aren't for everyone. Always talk to your healthcare provider before using any device. Stop using these devices if your symptoms get worse or if you develop new symptoms or pain.**

### Support apps

If you have stress incontinence, there are electronic and mobile health tools available to support you, like smart phone apps, online education, and virtual health options. These should not replace other treatments or guidance from your healthcare team but could be used as an added support.



- Pelvic floor devices and biofeedback devices are not covered through the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. If you have extended health coverage, your plan may help cover the cost.

### Bladder training (bladder re-training)

- If you have symptoms of an overactive bladder or urgency incontinence, [bladder training](#) may help. With bladder training, you slowly increase the length of time that you wait to urinate once you get the urge to go. Some strategies to delay urination include:
  - Stay still instead of running to the toilet.
  - Do pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegels) (see page 14 for instructions on how to perform this).
  - Focus on something else, like counting backwards.
  - Do controlled breathing and relaxation – slow, deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth, focusing on relaxing your body.
  - Cross your legs.
- Keep a bladder diary for a few days and bring it to your healthcare provider to help find a bladder training program that will work for you.

#### A word of caution

- You may have heard or seen advertisements promoting special treatments for urinary symptoms (like laser therapy) or special devices (like incontinence treatment chairs).
- If you see an advertisement for the treatment of urinary symptoms that you are interested in, talk to your healthcare provider first. There is often little to no evidence that these options are effective, and they can be very costly to try.

### Lifestyle changes

#### Self-care

- If you have trouble reaching the bathroom before you urinate, try making a clearer, quicker path to the bathroom and wearing clothes that are easily removed (such as those with elastic waistbands or Velcro closures). Or keep a commode close to your bed or chair.
- **Absorbent products** can help you manage leakage, offering comfort and confidence while you explore treatment options for LUTS. These products are specifically designed to absorb liquid quickly and reduce the smell of urine. They can be disposable or reusable and help absorb urine when you leak so that you can continue to do the things

you enjoy. Choosing the right product depends on your lifestyle and how severe your symptoms are. You may have to test out a few products to find one (or a few) that work best for you. Examples are:

- Bladder control pads – these pads are different from menstrual pads because they absorb liquid faster and help reduce the smell of urine
- Disposable briefs (available in several sizes and styles)
- Plastic-coated underwear, belted undergarments
- Learn more: [Learning About Adult Protective Underwear for Women](#)
- Skin care: Barrier creams, gels, and ointments protect your skin from moisture and can be helpful to reduce skin irritation and rashes. If you are using absorbent products, change them as often as needed. If they are reusable, wash them with a gentle liquid soap that moisturizes and protects. Contact your healthcare team if you notice changes with your skin.
- Toilet aids like bedpans, urinals, raised toilet seats, and commodes can help if you have:
  - Trouble getting to the bathroom on time
  - To get up often in the night to use the toilet
  - A hard time using a standard toilet
  - Impaired mobility

Talk to your healthcare provider about local options for buying or renting these toilet aids.

### Stop or reduce smoking

- Nicotine can affect the muscles of the bladder wall and increase the frequency and urgency of urination, leading to more discomfort. People who smoke are more likely to develop overactive bladder than people who don't smoke.
- Quitting smoking can also reduce coughing, which can help reduce leaking urine.
- For support to smoke less or quit, visit [albertaquits.ca](http://albertaquits.ca).

### Maintain a healthy weight

Having extra weight puts pressure on your bladder, which can impact urinary incontinence. In some cases, this can be the main cause of urinary incontinence.

If you need support to maintain a healthy weight:

- Alberta Healthy Living Program offers free services to people in Alberta, like health and nutrition education and individual support from dietitians. Learn more: [ahs.ca/ahlp](http://ahs.ca/ahlp).
- MyHealth Alberta has online learning modules to help with weight management. Visit [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca) and type “Weight Management Learning Modules” into the search bar.

- Health Link has registered dietitians available to answer nutrition questions. Complete a self-referral at [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811) or call 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian.

### Food and drink

- Limiting caffeine, alcohol, and fizzy drinks can help reduce your symptoms. These drinks can make LUTS worse, so small changes in what you drink can often improve your symptoms.
- Your healthcare team may also give you tips on how much to drink and when.
- Consider using a bladder diary to write down what you eat and drink to see if any foods or fluids are triggering your symptoms.
- A registered dietitian can help you maintain a healthy diet and avoid unnecessary food restrictions. Complete a self-referral at [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811) or call 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian.
- A balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins can help improve your overall health. If there are any foods that seem to make your symptoms worse, consider limiting.

### Avoid constipation

- Eating high fibre food each day like fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains will help keep you regular. For more ideas, visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) and search for “constipation.”
- While it is best to try high fibre foods first, a fibre supplement (like Prodiem or Metamucil) can be taken every day if needed. Read and follow all instructions on the label. Make sure to stay hydrated when taking a fibre supplement.
- Schedule time every day for a bowel movement. Having a daily routine may help. Don't rush or strain when having a bowel movement.
- Use the [Bristol Stool Chart](#) to describe the types of bowel movements you are having.

### Physical activity

- Be physically active every day. Try to do moderate to vigorous activity at least 2½ hours a week and limit long periods of sedentary activity. All movements count, even standing.
- Regular exercise can improve bladder control and reduce symptoms. Activities like walking, swimming, or cycling are great for overall health and can ease pressure on your bladder.

### Medication

Different medicines can help manage lower urinary tract symptoms. Your healthcare provider may suggest specific medicines based on the type and severity of your symptoms:

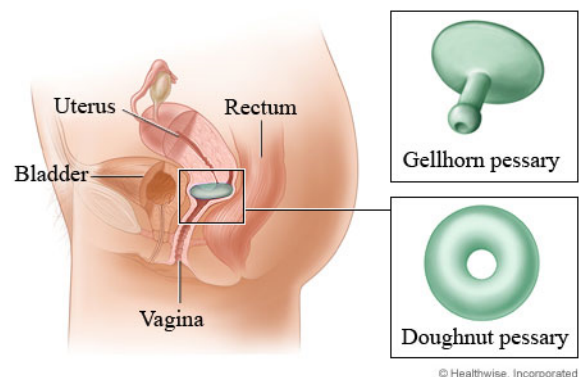
- **Alpha-blockers:** These medicines are often used if you have symptoms like a weak urine stream or difficulty starting to pee. They work by relaxing the muscles in your urethra and bladder, making it easier to urinate.
- **Antimuscarinics:** These medicines help symptoms of an overactive bladder by controlling bladder sensations and reducing the urge to go.
- **Beta-3 agonists:** These medicines can help treat overactive bladder by reducing the intensity of bladder sensations, allowing it to store more urine and reduce the frequency of urination.
- **Diuretics:** Sometimes, if you get up at night frequently, your healthcare provider may recommend taking a diuretic medicine in the late afternoon to help your body get rid of excess fluid during the day. This can reduce nighttime urination.
- **Menopause hormone therapy:** Estrogen plays a crucial role in maintaining the health, strength, and function of the bladder, urethra, and surrounding pelvic tissues. Menopause hormone therapy may help with lower urinary tract symptoms by reversing tissue weakness caused by declining estrogen levels during menopause.
- **Antibiotics:** If your symptoms are caused by a urinary tract infection (UTI), your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics to treat the infection. These medicines help clear the bacteria causing the infection and usually improve symptoms within a few days. It's important to take the full course as prescribed, even if you start to feel better.

Your healthcare team will prescribe the right medicine for you based on your specific symptoms, overall health, and how severe your symptoms are. It's important to follow your healthcare team's instructions and discuss any side effects or concerns.

## Medical devices

### Pessary

A pessary is a silicone device that is placed in the vagina to hold the bladder and uterus in place. It can be used to treat stress incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse. Pessaries can provide symptom relief right away and have minimal risks compared to surgery. Pessaries are usually very effective and most people are satisfied with their pessary.



- Pessaries help decrease pressure on the bladder and bowel, increase the length of the urethra and gently compress the urethra, which helps stop leaking.
- Pessaries come in different shapes and sizes. You will work with your healthcare provider to find one that fits you properly. You may need to try a few different types

and sizes of pessary to find the one that works best for you. A pessary should not cause pain or pressure when in place.

- Once your healthcare provider has fitted you for a pessary, you can buy your pessary through a few different places (for example, through the clinic where the fitting occurs or through specialized pharmacies, medical supply stores or online).
- You can keep the pessary in when you go to the bathroom.
- Most pessaries can be worn while having sex (ask your healthcare provider).
- You can likely clean and care for your pessary yourself, but if you need help, ask your healthcare provider.
- You should get regular vaginal exams when you have a pessary. If you are able to care for your pessary on your own, it is recommended to have a vaginal exam once a year. If you need support caring for your pessary (for example, if your healthcare provider helps you clean it), it is recommended to have a vaginal exam every 3 months.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you notice vaginal discharge, a bad smell, irritation, bleeding, or pain when you use a pessary. These symptoms can usually be treated.

### Over-the-counter devices for stress incontinence

Over-the-counter devices for stress incontinence are also available. These devices are inserted into the vagina and apply light pressure on your urethra to slow or stop the flow of urine during activities like coughing, dancing, and jogging. You can still pee normally while wearing these devices. Starter kits are available to help you find the right size for you. Talk to your healthcare provider if you are interested in over-the-counter options.

### Surgery

Some people may want to explore surgical options instead of medicine to avoid potential side effects. Some of these treatments may not be covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan, and you may need to pay for them. In some cases, you may also need to travel outside of Alberta for surgical treatments. Talk with your healthcare team to see what might be best for you.

### How to make the right decision for you

Asking the following questions can help you make an informed decision about your different treatment options and decide which ones will work best for you:

**“What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?”**

**“Can I use any of these options together?”**

**“How will this make me feel? Will it have side effects?”**

**“What results can I expect?”**





## Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral

Depending on your symptoms, history and test results, you may need a referral to a specialist, such as a urologist, gynecologist, urogynecologist, or pelvic floor physiotherapist. If your healthcare provider recommends a referral, your specialist will meet with you at all steps along your journey to discuss your health concerns and review test results. The specialist may diagnose your concern, order more tests, and discuss treatment and management options with you.

You can also make your own appointment with a pelvic floor physiotherapist without a referral.

**Urologist:** specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the male and female urinary system and disorders of the male reproductive system.

**Urogynecologist:** specializes in treating pelvic floor conditions.

**Gynecologist:** specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of conditions of the vulva, vagina, uterus, and ovaries.

**Pelvic floor physiotherapist:** specializes in the function of the pelvic floor and can offer information, treatment, and advice on managing urinary incontinence through pelvic floor training, bladder training, and biofeedback.



### Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, check out the QuRE Patient and Caregiver Journal by visiting [ahs.ca/quire](https://ahs.ca/quire).

AHS Rehabilitation Advice Line: You can make your own appointment for pelvic floor physiotherapy or find a clinic near you by calling the AHS Rehabilitation Advice Line at 1-833-379-0563 (Monday through Friday).





## Start your treatment and watch your symptoms

As you try your treatment options, remember that if something doesn't work the way you thought it would, think about other options and connect with your healthcare provider to find a treatment that will work for you.

Watch for changes in symptoms. Are they getting better or worse? Do you have new symptoms? Are there any side effects that are causing you problems? Consider continuing to use a [bladder diary](#) to see how things change over time and make it easier to determine what works for you.

Tell your healthcare provider if you notice:

- Symptoms of infection - like fever and chills, burning or pain when peeing, blood in urine, pain in your lower back and pelvis, and generally feeling unwell
- Post-menopausal bleeding (bleeding 12 months after your regular periods have stopped)
- Unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite and night sweats

**Call your healthcare provider or 811 now if you notice:**

- Blood in your urine, especially without pain
- You cannot urinate at all
- New swelling in your feet and ankles

Watching your symptoms is important. Call your healthcare provider or Health Link at 811 if you have any concerns. You might feel like you don't want to bother your healthcare team, but no detail is too small to share. If it matters to you, it will matter to your healthcare team.

You can clarify with your healthcare team what to expect in terms of follow-up communication. Connect with your healthcare team whenever you:

- Have questions
- Notice your symptoms getting worse
- Have problems with your medicine
- Haven't gotten test results or heard back about an appointment in the time you had agreed to



### Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialing **811**.





There are many different things that can impact your health and wellness. It is important to be able to work with your healthcare team to decide what is best for you, in your life, given your own unique circumstances as you manage your lower urinary tract symptoms.

Remember, you don't need to do everything all at once. Take realistic and manageable steps in your health and wellness. Consider why making a change may benefit you and the things that matter to you.



### Helpful tools and resources

#### **Find programs and resources in your community:**

211 connects Albertans to the programs and resources they need, anytime, day or night. Whether you're looking for help with mental health, financial assistance, basic needs or other challenges, 211 is here to help you find supports. It's free, confidential, and available in over 170 languages by phone, making it easy to access help when you need it.

To connect with **211 Alberta**:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Chat or search at [ab.211.ca](http://ab.211.ca)

The **Alberta Healthy Living Program** offers free workshops, classes, and supervised exercise and nutrition services to adults living with a variety of chronic conditions and diseases. Many education classes and workshops are available province wide. Learn more by visiting [ahs.ca/ahlp](http://ahs.ca/ahlp).

**Chronic Disease Management support:** [ahs.ca/cdm](http://ahs.ca/cdm)

**Health Information & Tools:** [myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx](http://myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx)



There's lots of information out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

### PATIENT RESOURCES

Resource	Link
<b>Patient Pathway</b>	<a href="#">Your Journey with Female Urinary Incontinence</a> <a href="#">Your Journey with Recurrent Lower Urinary Tract Infection</a>
<b>Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Webinars</b>	<a href="#">Pelvic health physiotherapy webinars (alberta.ca)</a>
<b>Pelvic Floor Clinic (Calgary Zone)</b>	<a href="#">Understanding Your Pelvic Floor - The next step</a>
<b>MyHealth Alberta</b>	<a href="#">Urinary Incontinence</a> <a href="#">Behavioural Methods for Urinary Incontinence</a> including Kegel exercises
<b>Pelvic Floor Therapy</b> How to find a pelvic floor therapist	<a href="#">College of Physiotherapists of Alberta</a> AHS Rehabilitation Advice Line: 1-833-379-0563 Monday to Friday
<b>Your Pelvic Floor</b> Information on vaginal estrogen therapies	<a href="#">International Urogynecological Association: Your Pelvic Floor</a> <a href="#">International Urogynecological Association: Low-Dose Vaginal Estrogen Therapy - Your Pelvic Floor</a>
<b>Voices for Pelvic Floor Disorders</b>	<a href="#">Voices for PFD (Pelvic Floor Disorders)</a>
<b>Canadian Continence Foundation</b> Comprehensive overview of many bladder health conditions for female and male.	<a href="#">Continence Information and Resources on Treating Bladder &amp; Bowel Incontinence</a> <a href="#">Learn About Urinary Incontinence and Bladder Control Problems</a>



<p><b>Adult Community Rehabilitation</b> Information for Albertans (Alberta Health Services)</p>	<p><a href="https://ahs.ca/rehab/Page15329.aspx">ahs.ca/rehab/Page15329.aspx</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pelvic Health can be selected from the drop-down menu</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supports to quit smoking</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Your journey with quitting tobacco or nicotine</a></p> <p><a href="https://albertaquits.ca">albertaquits.ca</a></p>
<p><b>Nutrition Services</b></p>	
<p>Online Learning Module on Weight Management</p>	<p><a href="https://myhealth.alberta.ca/learning/modules/Weight-Management">myhealth.alberta.ca/learning/modules/Weight-Management</a></p>
<p>Nutrition Handouts</p>	<p><a href="https://ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts">ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts</a></p>
<p>Ask a Dietitian a Nutrition Question</p>	<p>Complete a self-referral at <a href="https://ahs.ca/811">ahs.ca/811</a> or call 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian.</p>

**Get help now:**

- **Emergency: Call 911**
- Health Link: Call 811

**Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:**

- 811 or [Addiction Helpline](#): 1-866-332-2322
- 811 or [Mental Health Helpline](#): 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: Call 988, or visit [988.ca](https://988.ca)

**Helpful tip**

If you can't print this resource at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider to print it for you. You can also use a computer and printer at your local library.

**Community and social supports:**

- 211 Alberta: Call 211, or visit [ab.211.ca](https://ab.211.ca)
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit [alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports](https://alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports)
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit [alberta.ca/income-support](https://alberta.ca/income-support)

**Alberta Health Services programs:**

- Home Care: [ahs.ca/homecare](https://ahs.ca/homecare)
- Find a Dietitian: [ahs.ca/nutrition](https://ahs.ca/nutrition)
  - Health Link has dietitians to answer nutrition questions. Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete the self-referral form on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
  - Spiritual Care Services: [ahs.ca/spiritualcare](https://ahs.ca/spiritualcare)

**Primary care (family doctors and nurse practitioners):**

- Find a doctor or nurse practitioner: [ahs.ca/findadoctor](https://ahs.ca/findadoctor)
- Virtual care guide: [ahs.ca/virtualhealth](https://ahs.ca/virtualhealth)

**Patient concerns and feedback:**

- Office of Alberta Health/Mental Health Patient Advocates: [alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates](https://alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates)
  - Offers coaching to help you advocate for yourself in the health system, and support to learn how the health system works and how to navigate through it.
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit [ahs.ca/patientfeedback](https://ahs.ca/patientfeedback)

## Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

## Notes

Use this space to take notes.

### **About this Pathway**

The Provincial Pathways Unit co-developed this patient pathway in partnership with patient and family advisors, and primary and specialty care providers in Alberta. It is current as of June 2026.

### **Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration**

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including specialists and primary care providers from across Alberta. Membership available on request by emailing [albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca](mailto:albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca).

### **Pathway Review Process**

Patient pathways undergo scheduled review every three years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is June 2029. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please send us your [feedback here](#).

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### **Disclaimer**

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated healthcare providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice, or professional competence.