BOWEL AND BLADDER HEALTH

Bowel, bladder and pelvic floor dysfunction are becoming increasingly common. Diagnoses include, but are not limited to, urinary incontinence, urinary frequency, constipation, frequent diarrhea, fecal incontinence or smearing, and bladder/uterine/rectal prolapse. What people may not realize is that bowel and bladder dysfunction are usually related. Below are some considerations:

- Constipation can lead to incomplete bladder emptying due to proximity of rectum and bladder/urethra and the pressure residual stool in the colon can place on these structures.
- Loose stools and even diarrhea can be related to constipation as they are easier for the body to pass when there is decreased motility and/or constipation elsewhere in the colon.
- Dehydration or lack of adequate water intake can lead to bladder irritation, incomplete bladder emptying, urine retention and frequent urinary tract infection (UTIs).
- Urinating too often can lead to an over active bladder and increased sensitivity to certain “triggers”: getting close to a bathroom, cold, running water, leaving or entering the home.
- Not urinating enough can lead to urine retention, overstretching of the bladder, overflow incontinence and lack of normal bladder urge/signal (normal number of voids per day is 7-8 with 0-1x/night).

FIRST LINE TREATMENTS

There are two main components for a healthy bowel and bladder system: water and fiber.

Fiber is what helps move stool through the body and empty appropriately. Increases in fiber intake are correlated with decreases in occurrence of numerous diseases. Normal stool types and regular bowel movements are necessary for mental (much of the serotonin in our bodies is produced in our gut) and physical health. One easy way to get more fiber is to add 1 tsp - 1 Tb of chia seeds and/or ground flaxseed to your oatmeal, smoothie or yogurt. Berries, apples, pears, prunes, dates and beans are also high in fiber. When adding fiber, start slowly so that the gut can adjust.

Adequate water intake is crucial for both regular and well-formed stools as well as flushing the bladder. There are numerous calculations as to how much water is enough. A good rule of thumb is to aim for 56-64 ounces per day. This number can be overwhelming to some, so start with adding just 4 ounces of water per day to what you are already drinking. As this becomes easy, add 4 more ounces until you reach the goal. Carbonation can be irritating to the bladder, so try to avoid sparkling waters.

Caffeinated beverages (tea, coffee, soda, energy drinks) often contribute to bladder over-activity and incontinence. Caffeine is a diuretic so it draws more water out of the body than what you are drinking. If you are drinking any caffeinated beverages, add the same amount of water in ounces to match what you are drinking with caffeine (for example: if you drink 8 ounces of coffee or tea per day aim to drink 60 ounces of water per day + 8 ounces of water). Another option is to look for half caffeinated beverages or decrease the amount of caffeinated beverages you are drinking.

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