

Women's Genitourinary Health

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Conditions affecting the genitourinary system in women that are commonly treated by a urologist are: Urinary tract infection, urinary incontinence, kidney/ureteral stone, cystitis (painful inflammation of the bladder), bladder cancer, kidney cancer, and ureteral cancer.

Some tips for maintaining a healthy genitourinary tract in women are:

1. Drink water—Water helps the kidneys function and remove waste products. Water helps flush bacteria from the urinary tract reducing the risk for urinary tract infections. Not drinking enough water can lead to kidney stones. How much water should you drink? Recommendations from the Institutes of Medicine (published Feb 2004)

<http://www.iom.edu>

- The vast majority of healthy people adequately meet their daily hydration needs by letting thirst be their guide. The report did not specify exact requirements for water, but set general recommendations for women at approximately 2.7 liters (91 ounces) of total water -- from all beverages and foods -- each day. About 80 percent of people's total water intake comes from drinking water and beverages -- including caffeinated beverages -- and the other 20 percent is derived from food.

2. Reduce salt intake—Too much salt may cause you to retain water and disrupt the salt/mineral/water balance in your kidneys, which may put you at greater risk of kidney stones.

- According to the Institutes of Medicine healthy 19- to 50-year-old adults should consume 1.5 grams of sodium and 2.3 grams of chloride each day -- or 3.8 grams of salt -- to replace the amount lost daily on average through sweat and to achieve a diet that provides sufficient amounts of other essential nutrients. The tolerable upper intake level (UL) for salt is set at 5.8 grams per day. Older individuals, African Americans, and people with chronic diseases including hypertension, diabetes, and kidney disease are especially sensitive to the blood pressure-raising effects of salt and should consume less than the UL. Adults should consume at least 4.7 grams of potassium per day to lower blood pressure, blunt the effects of salt, and reduce the risk of kidney stones and bone loss. However, most American women 31 to 50 years old consume no more than half of the recommended amount of potassium, and men's intake is only moderately higher.
- Visit <http://patfulghammd.com/uploads/stoneprevention.pdf> for more info on reducing the risk for kidney stones.

3. Monitor caffeine intake - caffeine acts as a diuretic and may cause bladder irritation for women with cystitis.

4. Reducing the risk for urinary tract infections – In addition to drinking water to flush the urinary tract system, maintaining certain genitourinary hygiene practices will help to reduce the risk. After urination, wiping the genital area from front to back will keep bacteria from the vagina from entering the urinary tract. In addition, urinating before and after sex will reduce bacteria that may have entered the urethra. For more info on reducing the risk for urinary tract infections visit http://patfulghammd.com/uploads/Reducing_UTIs_in_women.pdf

5. Don't smoke—Smoking and prolonged exposure to second-hand smoke are among the leading causes of bladder and kidney cancer. http://patfulghammd.com/uploads/smoking_and_urologic_disease.pdf

6. Exercise—Pelvic Floor Muscle, or "Kegel" exercises help strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that help hold urine inside the bladder, preventing leakage. Exercising the core (abdomen) will also strength the pelvic floor and help to maintain balance. Balance is especially important as we age, reducing the risk for falls.

Pelvic floor exercises: <http://patfulghammd.com/uploads/pelvicfloorexercises.pdf>

Balance exercises: <http://patfulghammd.com/uploads/Balance.pdf>

7. Maintain a healthy weight—If you are obese, losing weight can help prevent kidney stones and incontinence.

8. Managing urgency and frequency: *Urinary urgency and frequency can be an embarrassing and upsetting condition in women.* **Urgency** is an unexpected, compelling need to urinate. It often causes discomfort in the bladder, tends to increase with age, and can cause urinary incontinence if it's not controlled. **Frequency** is the need to void more than usual. <http://patfulghammd.com/uploads/urgencyandfrequency.pdf>