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## Urine Retention

Urinary retention is a condition where you can't empty your bladder (the organ stores urine until you're ready to pee). Blockages, strictures (narrowing), damage to pelvic floor muscles, medicines, and other health problems can all cause urinary retention (also called bladder retention).

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### Types of urinary retention

**Acute urinary retention** comes on suddenly and usually goes away over time. This is the most common type of urinary retention in people with cancer. Certain things increase your risk of acute urinary retention (AUR):

- Having a prostate, especially as you age
- Having a history of bladder or pelvic floor muscle damage
- Having certain health conditions that cause nerve damage (such as diabetes)

**Acute urinary retention is often a medical emergency** that needs to be treated as soon as possible.

**Chronic urinary retention** usually develops slowly over time due to chronic (long-term) conditions such as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), diabetes, and kidney problems.

## What causes urinary retention?

Many things can cause bladder retention. Some common causes for people with cancer include:

- Tumors near the bladder from any type of cancer
- Brain and spinal cord tumors
- [Radiation therapy](#)<sup>1</sup> to the belly, bowel, pelvis, or reproductive organs (radiation cystitis)
- [Hormone therapy](#)<sup>2</sup>
- [Surgery](#)<sup>3</sup> and anesthesia
- [Constipation](#)<sup>4</sup>
- Enlarged prostate (benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH)
- Pelvic prolapse - the bladder, uterus, or rectum slips into the vaginal canal because of weak pelvic wall muscles
- Medicines such as [opioids](#)<sup>5</sup>, antidepressants, and muscle relaxants

## Tests for urinary retention

Your cancer care team might order tests if you have signs of urinary retention. Some common tests are:

- Bladder [ultrasound](#)<sup>6</sup> to measure the amount of urine in your bladder
- Urine tests to check for infection or other problems
- Blood tests to check your kidneys
- [Cystoscopy](#)<sup>7</sup> to look inside your urethra (the tube that urine comes out of) and bladder
- [CT scan](#)<sup>8</sup> or [MRI](#)<sup>9</sup> to take pictures of your belly

## Symptoms of urinary retention

Symptoms of urinary retention are different depending on the person. They sometimes seem like symptoms of a urinary tract infection (UTI).

The most common symptoms are:

- Lower belly swelling, pain, or discomfort

Leaking urine

used.

## Bladder training

Bladder training creates a schedule of times to pee. You also learn to use mental relaxation techniques to help with urges to go in between scheduled times, and track your progress in a bladder diary. The scheduled in-between times are made longer as you progress.

## Pelvic therapy and biofeedback

Pelvic floor (Kegel) exercises can help stretch tight pelvic muscles that support the bladder or other organs in the abdomen. Therapists or nurses trained in pelvic therapy can help you create a plan that is best for your situation.

Biofeedback uses sensors placed near the anus to show on a screen which pelvic muscles are being exercised. Biofeedback can help make pelvic therapy more effective.

## Surgery

In some cases, surgery might be used to treat retention:

- To remove a tumor or part of the prostate
- To repair a pelvic prolapse
- To remove scar tissue
- To change the direction of urine flow

## Tips for managing urinary retention

- Empty your bladder at least every 4 hours, even if you don't feel like you need to.
- Don't try to hold it if you feel like you need to pee.
- Don't push or bear down when trying to pee.
- Don't use products that can irritate your bladder such as scented wipes, soaps, or sprays.
- Prevent [constipation](#)<sup>10</sup>.

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## Talk to your doctor or cancer care team

If you:

- Suddenly can't pee
- Have pain or burning when you pee or try to pee
- Feel like you still need to pee after you go
- Notice blood in your pee
- Have belly pain or [vomiting](#)<sup>11</sup>
- Have a [fever](#)<sup>12</sup> with no known cause
- Have other signs of [infection](#)<sup>13</sup> such as sweating, chills, or a fast heartbeat

Ask your doctor or cancer care team what you should call right away for versus what can wait until office hours. Make sure you know who to contact when the office is closed.

[counts/fever.html](#)

13. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/low-blood-counts/infections.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/low-blood-counts/infections.html)

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