Dear Alice,

How frequently should I expect to urinate? I don't drink much liquid. I leave my job about once an hour. Is this normal? How can I cut back? Do I need to see a doctor?

Answer

Dear Reader,

In order to learn more about your current pattern of peeing, consider the following: have you always had to urinate about once an hour, or is this a change from your normal frequency? That's an important question, because if you have always gone about once an hour, then the frequent bathroom breaks may just be your body's normal rhythm (in which case there's likely no need to try to change or worry about your fluid intake or your bladder control to decrease the frequency).

If, however, once per hour is an increase over your usual frequency then it may be a good idea see your health care provider. When you make an appointment, try to take note of anything else you might be experiencing that could be related to frequent urination: Does frequent urination disrupt your sleep or productivity? Do you have pain in your abdomen and/or when you pee? Do you feel that it's difficult to control your bladder or have a strong urge to urinate? Is your pee discolored (brown or red) or do you have blood in your urine? If you do experience any of these, sharing them with health care provider will help them identify a cause or condition and get you proper treatment if it's needed. A number of things can cause increased urinary frequency, including:

- Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Diabetes
- Stress
- Caffeine and alcohol intake
- Use of certain medications, such as diuretics
- Certain heart or kidney conditions
- In women: pregnancy or bladder changes after menopause
- In men: prostate enlargement
When you see your health care provider, s/he will probably ask you some of the following questions:

- When did you begin urinating once per hour?
- About how much do you urinate each time? Has the amount changed?
- Do you feel a sense of urgency to urinate?
- Do you have any trouble starting to urinate?
- Do you have any other symptoms, such as burning or pain with urination?
- How strong is your urine stream?
- Do you ever experience dribbling or incontinence (urine leaking when you don't actually intend to urinate)?
- Do you ever notice blood in your urine?
- Are you taking any medications?

A simple urine test can also give your health care provider a lot of important information, including screening for the presence of infection, diabetes, or kidney problems.

If frequent urination turns out simply to be your normal pattern, then try to relax and "go with the flow." Continue to drink reasonable amounts of fluids ? about eight 8 oz. glasses a day ? unless the weather is quite hot or you are exercising, and in that case, you might need more. You'll know you're drinking enough if your urine is clear and light in color.

Strengthening the muscles in the pelvic area through specific exercises called "Kegels" help improve bladder control, although whether or not they decrease urinary frequency has not been specifically studied. If you're interested in learning how to do Kegel exercises, check out Kegel technique in the Go Ask Alice! archives.

Alice!

Category:
General Health [3]
Body Maintenance [4]
Body Emissions [5]

Related questions

Problems peeing with others present [6]
Diabetes mellitus [7]
Prostatitis [8]
Ouch! Burning pee! Is this a urinary tract infection (UTI)? [9]
Is it possible to drink too much water? [10]
Consequences of holding your pee? [11]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [12]
Medical Services (CUMC) [13]

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