Fluids

With the hotter weather approaching, we should be paying even more attention to a healthy fluid intake, every day. A consistently good fluid intake is needed for the healthy function of our entire body, not just the bladder and bowel. This is not surprising as our bodies are made up mainly of water.

It’s difficult to set a recommended fluid limit due to individual needs, which will vary according to whether we’re an adult or a child, different medical histories, varying exercise levels and how hot the day is.

Also, fluids are not just about water intake – although water is probably the best choice of fluid. Fluids include all our drinks, but even custards, jellies and soups. Fruit and vegetables also have a high fluid content, so what we eat can affect our fluid levels too.

Unfortunately, some people with bladder control problems cut down on their fluid intake to avoid leaking, but the opposite can happen. Concentrated urine may irritate the bladder lining, making it even more unstable. Maintaining a good fluid intake will help protect against urinary tract infections. Also, be sure to empty the bladder completely each time you visit the toilet. Relax: take the time to empty properly.

A low fluid level can also cause or worsen constipation: being constipated can impact on urinary incontinence because an over-full bowel presses on the bladder, or because straining can weaken the pelvic floor muscles (PFMs). The PFMs are important for good control of the bladder and the bowel, but they are small muscles and quite easily damaged.

Be aware, too, that soiling can sometimes be caused by loose or liquid motions moving around a bowel blockage and leaking out. It can appear as diarrhoea, but actually constipation is the real problem here. If you’re experiencing persistent faecal (bowel) leakage – sometimes referred to as soiling – you should talk to your doctor or continence nurse about help with bowel management.

To help your awareness of fluid in/fluid out, keeping a bladder diary can help - and you could take this along to a medical appointment. Bladder diary sheets can be obtained by phoning the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66 or downloaded at www.continence.org.au.

Recording your fluid intake, all toilet visits, urine volumes and any leakage episodes in this way can help identify problem areas, or foods or fluids that might be irritating your bladder or bowel. As you can keep track of your drinks too, you can also check that your daily fluid intake is a healthy one.

For more information and advice contact the free National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.

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