

# Does Being Overweight Bladder & Bowel Function?

Many health conditions are a result of being overweight or obese. Weight gain is a result of eating too much fatty, sweet or high-calorie foods, coupled with too little exercise. Many of today's common health conditions are called 'lifestyle diseases' as they're caused by our poor choices of (more) food and (less) activity over time. If you're overweight, you're in a high-risk group for poor bladder or bowel control.

## **Incontinence is in the background of many weight-related health problems:**

- Extra body weight presses down on (and weakens) the pelvic floor muscles (PFMs), which are involved, with good bladder and bowel control
- Nerve damage is associated with conditions such as with diabetes or a stroke and brain-to-bladder/bowel messaging systems can be damaged or interrupted
- Medicines taken for health conditions can cause incontinence as a side-effect
- Bowel function, including leakage (soiling) and passing uncontrolled wind are problems linked to being overweight and/or incontinent. Being 'regular' means passing a bowel motion anything from 1–3 times a day to 3 times a week (once a day is fairly normal). Bowel irregularity can be caused or worsened by eating too much and choosing the wrong foods (high-fat, high-sugar and/or low-fibre). Low exercise levels also contribute to poor bowel function – and to weight gain.
- Nocturia (waking frequently for overnight toilet visits) is a symptom of many other health problems. It leads to fatigue and lack of motivation and productivity the next day. Snacking and over-eating and less energy to exercise can be a result. Frequent urination with nocturia can train the bladder to have a smaller capacity.
- Lifestyle is often affected by both incontinence and by being overweight. Relationships, social and exercise activities, physical capacities, energy levels, work productivity, emotional health and self-esteem can lead to a downward health spiral – and the motivation to eat well and to exercise can suffer.

Health conditions linked to bladder or bowel problems

- Digestive conditions such as Crohn's, coeliac disease, colitis or diverticulitis, chronic diarrhoea or constipation.
- Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) and cystitis can be associated with toilet urgency and frequency and possibly leakage.
- Laxative over-use can create bowel problems. But a carefully tailored plan for their use is necessary in some cases (following a stroke or bowel surgery, or with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) or dementia, for example).
- After abdominal surgery (such as a prostatectomy) incontinence may be an issue.
- Nerve-related conditions like Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Parkinson's, spinal injury or brain trauma may result in incontinence.

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