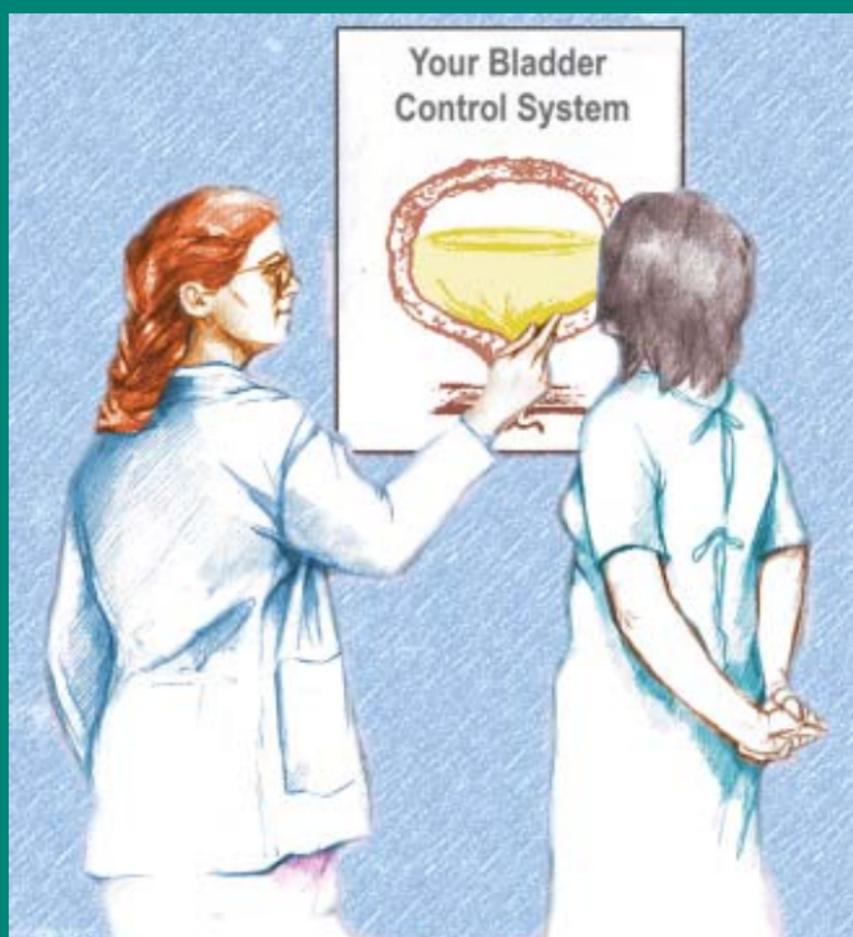


# Your Body's Design for Bladder Control



B L A D D E R

*Let's talk about bladder control for women.  
There's treatment that works.*

C O N T R O L

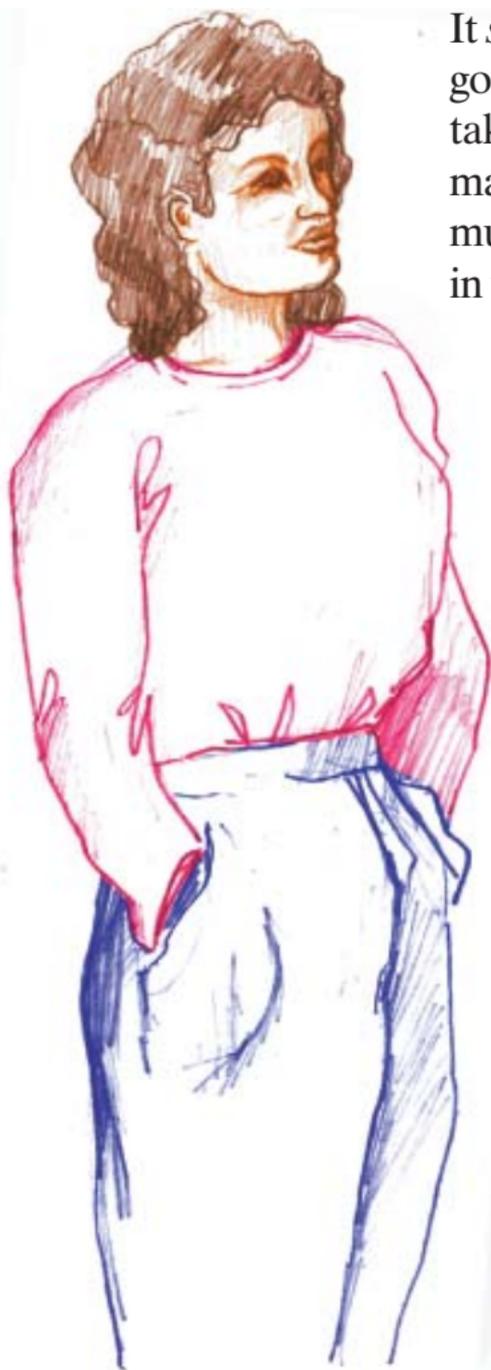
*Let's Talk about Bladder Control for Women* is a public health awareness campaign conducted by the National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NKUDIC), an information dissemination service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), National Institutes of Health.

1-800-891-5388

## Why learn about bladder control?

Good bladder control sounds simple. Just hold on until you get to the bathroom.

It *sounds* simple. But good bladder control takes teamwork from many organs, muscles, and nerves in your body.

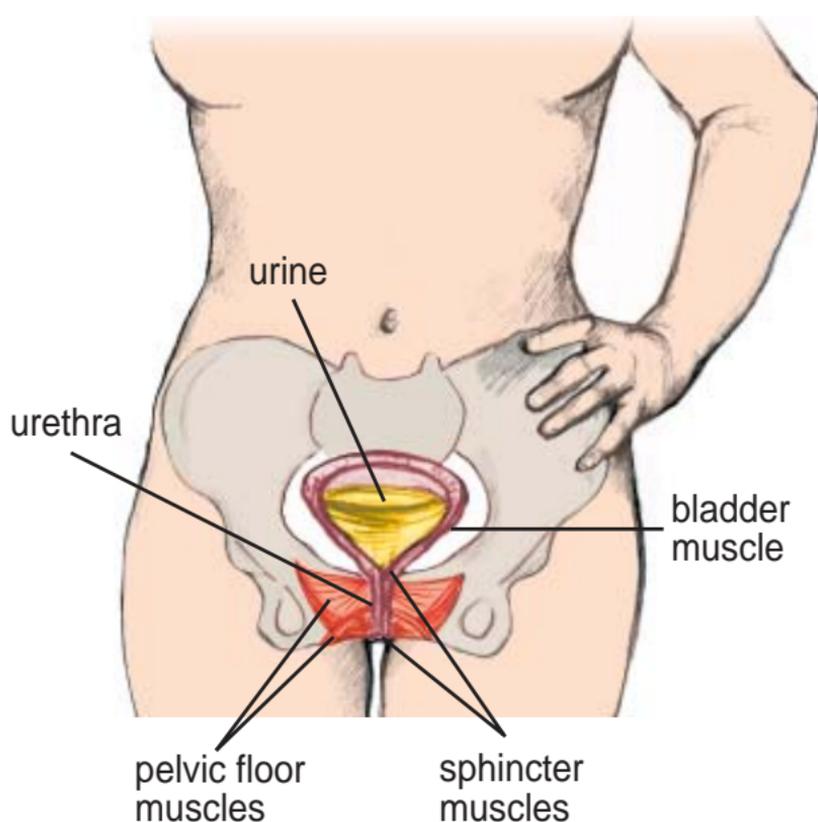


All women need to understand their bladder control system.

# What are the parts of the bladder control system?

Most of your bladder control system lies inside the *pelvis*.

Stand with your hands on your hips. The bones under your hands are the pelvic bones. Your pelvis is shaped like a big bowl. Your hands lie on the rim of the bowl. The bottom of the bowl, between your legs, is muscle.



Parts of the bladder control system

Four important body systems work inside the pelvic bowl:

## The bladder control system

- The *bladder* is a muscle shaped like a balloon. It holds urine.
- The *urethra* (yoo-REE-thrah) is a tube from the bladder that drains urine out of the body.
- Two *sphincter* (SFINK-tur) muscles help the urethra open and close.

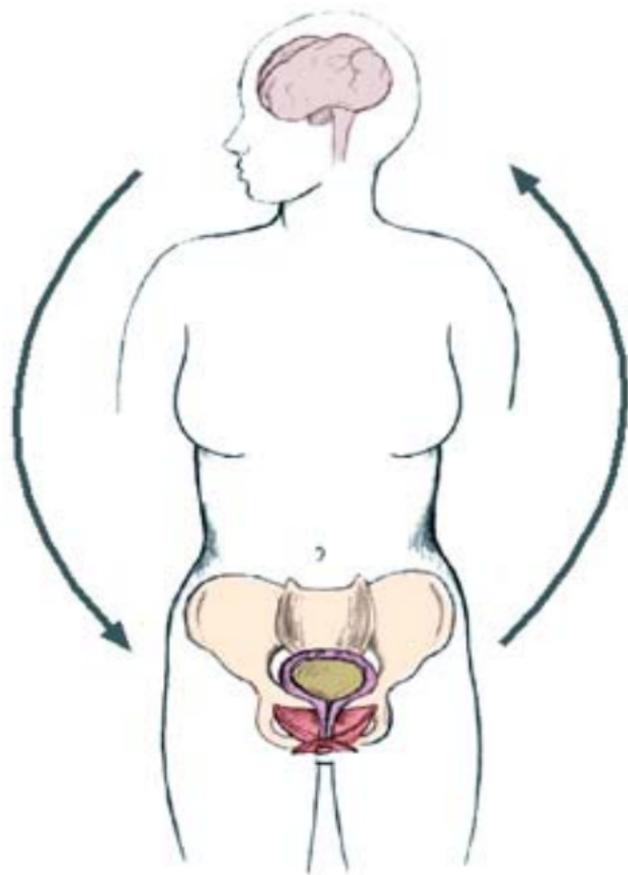
## The female system

- The womb, or *uterus* (YOO-ter-us), is an organ where your monthly periods come from and where unborn babies develop.
- The *vagina* (vuh-JY-nuh) is a canal where blood from your periods leaves the body and where babies come out.

## The digestive system

- The *rectum* (REK-tum) is an area where bowel movements go from the intestine.
- *The anus* (AY-nus) is the opening where bowel movements leave your body.

The brain sends nerve signals telling muscles to hold urine or let it out.

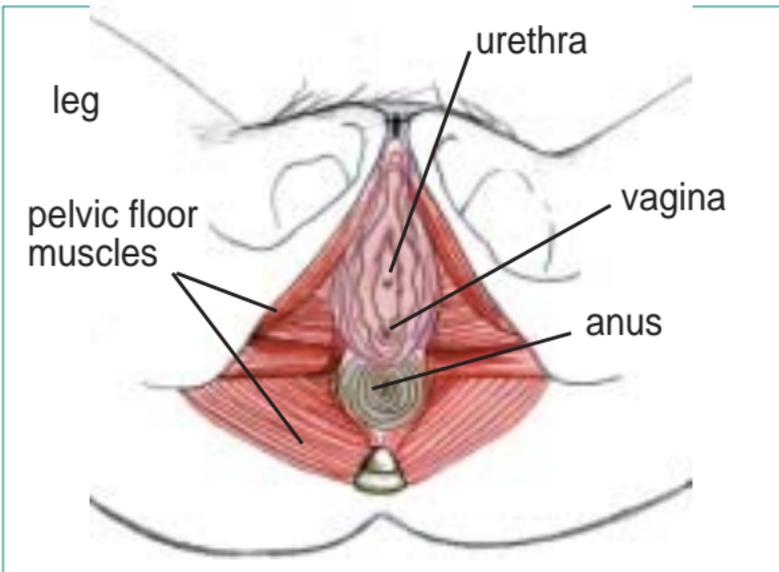


Nerves send signals to the brain.  
The signals tell when the bladder is full or empty.

Parts of the bladder control system: nerves and brain

## The nervous system

- *Nerves* send messages from your brain to your bladder and from your bladder to your brain.
- *Muscles* open and close to release or to hold urine.



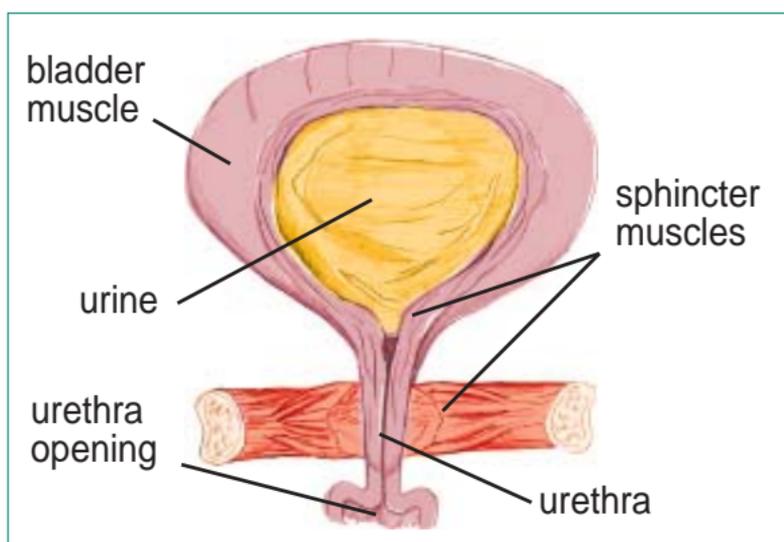
Pelvic floor muscles used for bladder control will grow stronger with daily exercise.

## What do bladder control muscles do?

Three sets of muscles control urine. One set is the bladder muscle itself. The second set is sphincter muscles that open and close the urethra. The third set is the muscles at the bottom of the pelvic bowl. They are called the *pelvic floor* muscles. They support the uterus, rectum, and bladder.

Sometimes pelvic muscles get stretched and weak. When this happens, organs in the pelvic bowl sag. Then women have trouble holding their urine. Luckily, exercising the pelvic muscles can often make them strong again.

Sometimes nerves are damaged by childbirth or other events. The damaged nerves signal the bladder muscles to squeeze urine out at the wrong times. Medical treatment can help women with this problem.



Healthy sphincter muscles can keep the urethra closed.

Bladder control means you urinate only when you want to. For good bladder control, all parts of your system must work together:

- Pelvic muscles must hold up the bladder and urethra.
- Sphincter muscles must open and shut the urethra.
- Nerves must control the muscles of the bladder and pelvic floor.

## Points to Remember

- Good bladder control results from many body systems working together.
- Three muscle systems control urine flow: the bladder muscle, sphincter muscles, and pelvic floor muscles.
- Many things can cause poor bladder control. The good news is that many medical treatments can help.

# National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse

3 Information Way

Bethesda, MD 20892-3580

Phone: 1-800-891-5390 or (301) 654-4415

Fax: (301) 907-8906

Email: [nkudic@info.niddk.nih.gov](mailto:nkudic@info.niddk.nih.gov)

Internet: [www.urologic.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.urologic.niddk.nih.gov)

The National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NKUDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1987, the clearinghouse provides information about diseases of the kidneys and urologic system to people with kidney and urologic disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. NKUDIC answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about kidney and urologic diseases.

Publications produced by the clearinghouse are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

This publication is not copyrighted. The clearinghouse encourages users of this fact sheet to duplicate and distribute as many copies as desired.

This publication is also available at [www.urologic.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.urologic.niddk.nih.gov).



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Public Health Service  
National Institutes of Health



**NIDDK**

National Institute of Diabetes and  
Digestive and Kidney Diseases

NIH Publication No. 02-4187  
April 2002