

# How do I play sports if I have a bladder, bowel or continence problem?



It can be difficult to take part in sports if you experience incontinence (leakage of wee and/or poo). You may also be worried about taking part in sports if you have a bladder or bowel condition that means you need to get to the toilet quickly or more frequently than usual.

Sports and activities can put pressure on the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor is the group of muscles at the bottom of your pelvis. It supports your bladder and bowel. It also supports the uterus (womb) in women and girls, but men and boys also have a pelvic floor.

Sports sometimes increase problems with wetting and soiling. This is because jerky movements, tightening of the abdominal muscles and increase in stretch and pressure on the pelvic floor that happens with exercise, can make the pelvic floor less able to hold onto wee and poo.

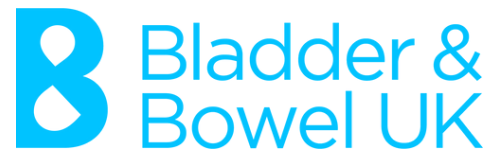
## **Should I stop exercising if I have incontinence or am worried about it?**

No. Exercising and taking part in sports can be fun, can help to build friendships and keeps our bodies fit, active and healthy. This is important for good mental and physical wellbeing and for maintaining a healthy weight. Therefore, you should continue to be active, unless your doctor or nurse tells you not to.

## **Do sports cause incontinence?**

It is unlikely that sports cause incontinence, but some activities put more pressure on the pelvic floor. These include activities that have sudden movements. Therefore, if you only experience incontinence when you exercise it may seem as if the sports are the cause. However, it is likely that you have an underlying bladder, bowel or pelvic floor problem. Assessment and treatment may be able to help with the underlying problem.

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## Managing sporting activities if you are worried about incontinence

Things that might help include:

- Try to exercise on soft surfaces such as grass.
- Wear trainers because these have some cushioning that helps reduce impact and so pressure on your pelvic floor.
- Consider avoiding exercise that includes lots of jerky movements such as trampolining and exercise that puts extra strain on the abdominal muscles and pelvic floor, such as lifting heavy weights.
- Empty your bladder before you start exercising.
- Try not to exercise straight after a large meal.
- Drink plenty of water to make sure you remain well hydrated. Drinking less makes the urine (wee) more concentrated, which can irritate the bladder and make incontinence worse.
- Try to avoid drinking caffeine (caffeine is in tea, coffee, hot chocolate, cola and some energy drinks). Caffeine can irritate the bladder and make incontinence more likely.
- You could consider using an incontinence pad while exercising.
- Talk to your GP or school nurse. They should be able to explain what they think is causing the problems for you and make suggestions to help or refer you to a specialist service.

## Incontinence and bladder and bowel issues can be treated

Problems with how strong the pelvic floor muscles are and how well they are working are not the only causes of incontinence in teenagers. It is important to know that incontinence and other bladder and bowel issues can be treated.

Speak to your school nurse, GP or other healthcare professional for advice and support.

## Further information

Find more information about bladder and bowel health in our information library at [www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk). You can also contact the [\*\*Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline \(0161 214 4591\)\*\*](tel:01612144591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.