

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER...

BOWEL AND BLADDER FUNCTIONS

Typically, information about ALS includes a blanket statement that bladder and bowel functions are not affected. This is because the muscles primarily involved in the elimination of stool and urine are INVOLUNTARY, while ALS primarily impacts VOLUNTARY muscles. Regular digestion and elimination are vital bodily functions and contribute to our quality of life and overall sense of wellbeing.

Patients with ALS experience changes in mobility and difficulty swallowing. They rely on the assistance of others for toileting. Constipation, urinary retention, or other bladder control issues can result from any of these changes in a patient's physicality. Medications prescribed to treat other symptoms of ALS can also affect bowel and bladder function.

Avoid holding in urine. Muscles can weaken from disuse causing urinary leakage and cramping. Holding in urine can also lead to increased bacterial growth, which can result in urinary tract infections and other potentially dangerous conditions, such as kidney disease and even kidney failure. Absorbent pads and other products, including condom drainage for men, can help manage the symptoms of urinary incontinence. Talk to your care provider if something more invasive, such as a catheter, may be an acceptable option.

Never ignore the urge for a bowel movement. Enlist the help of your caregiver to ensure that help is there when you need it. Scheduled bathroom breaks keep the bladder empty and encourage regular bowel movements – don't wait until you need to 'go'.

So, what can be done about this?

- Increase fluid intake! Regular intake of water throughout the day are said to be good for your health which includes bowel and bladder function. If you cannot swallow and use a feeding tube for nutrition, use it for hydration too! Do not restrict your fluid intake to reduce urinary incontinence. Try to reduce or eliminate liquids and foods such as coffee, tea, chocolate and some soft drinks that act as diuretics (causing increased passing of urine). Alcohol and some carbonated beverages and foods can irritate the bladder and cause urinary urgency and frequency.
- Increase the fibre in your diet. If you use a feeding tube, look for an approved formula with increased fibre. Keep in mind that increased dietary fibre can lead to loose stools and diarrhea particularly, as your body adjusts. Consult your healthcare professional for advice.
- If you can, move. Ask your physiotherapist if passive movements can help. Pelvic floor exercises, affectionately known as Kegel's, can help strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor.
- Stool softeners and even laxatives may be helpful. Do not use these on your own – always check with your healthcare provider whether this is appropriate for you.

Listen to your body – it will tell you what you need to know.