

## *The Women's Center*

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### **10 Foods to Avoid if You Have an Overactive Bladder**

**It's not necessarily how much you drink and eat, but what.**

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Decreasing fluids is often the first thing tried by someone seeking to control an overactive bladder. After all, if you drink less overall, you reduce the need to use the bathroom often or the chance of having an accident before you can get there. Right?

Yes - but if you drink too little (fewer than about eight cups a day), urine becomes concentrated, which can cause even more bladder irritation. That's why equally important to managing bladder problems is what you're drinking and eating.

Whether you're plagued by stress incontinence, urge incontinence, or some other form of overactive bladder syndrome, try eliminating some of the following foods and beverages. Keep a food diary to see if the change makes a difference. All of the following are known to exacerbate bladder problems in some people.

#### **1. Avoid: Oranges, grapefruit, pineapple**

Citrus tends to irritate the bladder (even though, in general, it's wise to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables for their healthy, vitamin-rich liquid and fiber). Beware especially of oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes, and tangerines. Pineapple, not technically a citrus fruit (even though it often appears in the same tropical salads), is also a culprit because it's highly acidic. Also avoid citrus in juice form (orange, grapefruit or lemon juice).

**Better:** Substitute nonacidic whole fruits, such as bananas, apples, pears, and berries.

#### **2. Avoid: Milk Chocolate**

This one may be painful to chocoholics, but chocolate contains caffeine, a substance that annoys the bladder. Hot chocolate is especially irritating since it's in liquid form.

**Better:** Go dark. Dark chocolate - above 70 percent cocoa - is more likely to satisfy a choco-tooth in very small (one- to two-ounce) amounts.

#### **3. Avoid: Coffee and black tea -- even decaf**

Most people with overactive bladder know to avoid coffee. It's a diuretic, which causes you to urinate more often, and it contains caffeine, which stimulates the bladder. The surprise: Even decaf versions have this effect. That's because decaffeinated coffee and tea are seldom caffeine-free. (Avoid iced tea and coffee, as well as hot forms.)

**Better:** Drink herbal tea, (be sure it has no caffeine).

#### **4. Avoid: Hot sauce, chili peppers, wasabi**

Spicy nachos, hot peppers, jambalaya, kabobs, curries . . . some like it hot, hot, hot, but should not. Among the many physical effects super-spicy foods have on the body (like watering eyes and burning lips) is a tendency to irritate the lining of the bladder.

**Better:** Choose cooled-down versions of favorite dishes, using herbs, garlic, and other strong flavors in place of spicy ones.

#### **5. Avoid: Sugar and honey**

While it's challenging to completely eliminate sweets, it's worth cutting back, since sugars tend to stimulate the bladder. Leave the extra spoonfuls out of your cereal bowl and read labels to avoid packaged goods that list simple sugars high in the ingredients list. Know that for some people, even artificial sweeteners (such as aspartame) irritate.

#### **6. Avoid: Tomato products**

Tomatoes are acidic; hence their bladder-irritating quality. The effect varies by individual, but if you're vulnerable, try cutting out all tomato forms, including sauces, paste, juice, spaghetti sauce, taco sauce, and salsa.

**Better:** Substitute mushrooms and other vegetables, a thin white sauce, beans, or other ingredients wherever you'd use tomatoes or tomato sauce.

#### **7. Avoid: Alcohol**

Whether in the form of wine, beer, champagne, or hard liquor, alcohol interferes with brain signals that tell you when to "go." It's also a dehydrator that makes you need to go to the bathroom more.

**Better:** Drink cranberry juice on the rocks (unless you're sensitive to cranberry; if so, you could try herbal tea on the rocks).

#### **8. Avoid: Milk and cheese**

Different dairy products tend to affect people differently. For some, all dairy is a bladder-baddie. Others are bothered only by very rich and creamy milk products, such as cream cheese, sour cream, or aged cheeses.

**Better:** Tinker to see which products you tolerate best.

#### **9. Avoid: Energy drinks**

You'd think these powerhouse beverages would make you stronger and help you last longer -- but the source of their "energy" is usually caffeine, which bothers the bladder. Read labels carefully.

**Better:** Get enough exercise and sleep to boost your energy naturally..

#### **10. Avoid: Carbonated drinks**

Quenching your thirst with a carbonated beverage (colas, other flavors, fizzy water, seltzer) is counterproductive if you have an overactive bladder. The carbonation is a bladder trigger, an effect that's intensified if the drink also contains caffeine. Unfortunately, champagne must be included in the list of carbonated drinks. In addition to the bubbles, bubbly contains alcohol, another overactive-bladder culprit.

**Better:** Drink straight water on the rocks or flavored (flat) vitamin waters.