Your Journey with Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms (LUTS) for those with Male Urinary Organs

For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/male-luts-pathway

Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) are problems that affect how you urinate (pee). These might include leaking urine, a sudden and frequent urge to urinate, a weak urine stream, or the feeling that your bladder is not completely empty after you finish. You play the most important role in your healthcare. This guide is created for people with male urinary organs. It will help you understand what to expect as you work with your healthcare team to manage and treat LUTS. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask your healthcare team. You can click on the blue page numbers for more information about each step of your journey.

Before your appointment (page 4)

- Write down how you feel, your symptoms, and any questions or concerns.
- LUTS can include dribbling urine after you urinate, having to urinate a lot at night, having a strong and frequent need to urinate, feeling like you cannot empty your bladder, or having a weak or slow stream of urine.

Visit your healthcare provider (page 6)

- Consider bringing a family member or friend to support you.
- Share all of your symptoms and concerns. Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements.
- Your healthcare provider may ask you to fill out a form called the International Prostate Symptom Score (IPSS). You may want to fill this out before your appointment. This will help your healthcare team to understand the severity of your symptoms and develop your treatment plan.
- Your healthcare provider may need to look at and feel around your genital region and they may do a digital rectal exam (DRE). This involves inserting their gloved and lubricated finger into your rectum to feel for anything abnormal.

Whole-person health (page 2)

Get your tests (page 8)

- You may be asked to give a urine sample and complete blood work to understand the health of your kidneys and prostate gland.
- Some patients may need to get a scan of their kidneys and bladder.
- It is important to talk with your healthcare team about what tests are right for you based on your age, symptoms, and treatment plans.

Review your test results (page 9)

- Find some of your test results on MyHealth Records or MyAHS Connect (myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords).
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test results mean and how they will help your team and you decide what to do next.

Review your treatment, management & prevention options (page 10)

- You may need to adjust what you eat and drink, your activity levels, and your bathroom habits.
- All patients with LUTS can benefit by keeping a voiding diary and reducing bladder irritants such as caffeine, alcohol, carbonated drinks, and reducing or quitting smoking.
- Your healthcare provider may suggest specific medications based on your symptoms.
- Some patients may benefit from seeing a physiotherapist for pelvic floor exercises, although not all treatments are covered by Alberta Health Care.

Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral (page 13)

- Not all patients need a referral to see a specialist like a urologist.
- A referral is determined based on the type and severity of your symptoms and what previous strategies and treatments you have already tried.

Start your treatment & watch your symptoms (page 14)

- If you have blood in your urine or are unable to urinate, make sure to tell your healthcare team immediately.
- Take an active role in your care.

Keep taking care of yourself (page 15)

- Keep taking care of your overall health.
- Look for other healthy lifestyle resources and supports.

Important Tips:

Need a family doctor?
ahs.ca/findadoctor

Need a translator or interpreter? Let your healthcare provider know

Need health advice?
Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and resources in your community?
Call 211 or visit ab.211.ca

Alberta Health Services

Current as of: March 2025

Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare team better manage your health condition. It is drawn from the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare team.

Whole-person health

- **Physical**: your specific health conditions and how well your body works
- **Financial and Social**: your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships
- **Spiritual**: your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose
- **Emotional**: how you think, feel, and cope with life events

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare provider needs to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

"What are the things in my life that are important to me?"

"What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?"

Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare provider:

Physical

"My symptoms are making it hard for me to do my job."

"Because of my urinary leaking it is hard for me to exercise, like I want."

"I have the uncomfortable feeling I still need to pee, after just urinating."

Financial and Social

"I'm worried I won't be able to get to all of my appointments."

"I need my son/daughter with me as a translator."

"I'm not sure how I will pay for my medications this month."

Emotional

"I'm lonely and have no one to talk to."

"I have a lot of stress and I'm not sure how to manage it."

"I am finding it difficult to manage how I am feeling during the day, as I am having to wake up so many times in the night to pee."

Spiritual

"It's important that I follow traditional healing practices."

"How can I include my culture's foods and family recipes in my nutrition plan?"

"It's important that my religious practice of fasting is respected and brought into my care."

What are lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS)?

Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) are problems that happen when there is an issue with how you urinate. These symptoms may affect how often, how easily, or how much you urinate. LUTS can include different things, like:

- **Frequent urination**: You might feel like you have to go to the bathroom a lot, even if you haven't drunk much or if you urinated recently.
- **A sudden urgency to urinate:** You may feel you need to urinate "all of a sudden" or find it difficult to hold on long enough, even if your bladder isn't full.
- **Leaking urine**: This is when urine comes out without you being able to control it. It is called incontinence.
- **Weak urine stream**: This is when the flow of urine is very slow or weak, making it harder to urinate.
- **Feeling like your bladder isn't fully empty**: Even after you finish urinating, you might still feel like you need to urinate again.
- **Waking up during the night to urinate (nocturia)**: It can happen once or several times and this may affect your sleep.

Before your appointment

Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) can have a big impact on your quality of life. These symptoms, like leaking urine, needing to urinate often, or waking up during the night to urinate (nocturia), can make everyday activities harder. Here are some ways LUTS might affect your life:

- **Sleep disruptions**: If you wake up multiple times during the night to urinate, it can affect how well you sleep. Poor sleep may make you feel tired and less focused during the day.
- **Embarrassment or stress**: Problems like leaking urine (incontinence) or needing to rush to the bathroom can be stressful or embarrassing, especially in public or social situations. This can lead to feelings of frustration or anxiety.
- **Limits on activities**: Frequent bathroom trips or worrying about accidents can make it harder to enjoy activities you used to like, such as exercising, traveling, or going out with friends and family.
- **Difficulty with work or daily tasks**: Constantly needing to go to the bathroom can make it harder to focus at work or finish everyday tasks, like cooking or running errands.

- **Impact on relationships**: LUTS can also affect your relationships, as it may be difficult to talk about these issues or cause stress with your partner or loved ones.

It's important to remember that you don't have to deal with LUTS on your own. Talking to your healthcare provider can help you find ways to manage the symptoms and improve your quality of life.

Here are a few tips to help you get ready for your appointment with your healthcare provider:

- Consider using a symptom tracker to write down important information to share with your healthcare team about your symptom(s).
- A symptom tracker can help you remember what symptom(s) you're feeling, when it started, how often it happens, and what makes it better or worse.
- A **voiding diary** is a tool that your healthcare team can use to figure out if you are having trouble urinating and, if there is a problem, how the problem may be treated.
- Ask someone you trust to go with you to your appointment. They can help you ask questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations.

Helpful tools and resources

- A **voiding diary** can be very helpful: Canadian Urological Association voiding diary
- **Use a symptom tracker:** hqca.ca/symptom-tracker (Health Quality Council of Alberta)
- To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or see the Alberta Health Services **My Care Conversations app** (ahs.ca/careapp) website for more information about recording your conversation with your healthcare provider.

Healthcare provider's assessment

When you visit your healthcare provider for help with lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS), they may do the following to better understand your symptoms and how they're affecting you.

Assess the severity of your symptoms using the International Prostate Symptom Score (IPSS):

- The IPSS is a simple questionnaire your healthcare team may ask you to fill out. You can also fill it out before your appointment.
- Here is where you can find the questions to score your symptoms: IPSS questionnaire.
- It asks about your symptoms, like how often you need to go to the bathroom, if you have a weak urine stream, or if you wake up at night to urinate. There are no right or wrong answers, and this helps your healthcare team understand how severe your symptoms are as well as what treatment options might work best for you.

Examine external genitalia:

- This is a physical exam where your healthcare provider looks at the outside of your genitals. They check for any signs of problems, like infections, swelling, or other unusual changes. This exam helps them rule out possible causes of your symptoms.

Digital rectal exam (DRE):

- Your healthcare provider may decide that you need this exam depending on your age and risk factors.
- A digital rectal exam is a test where your healthcare provider gently inserts a gloved finger into your rectum (the opening at the end of your digestive tract). This helps to feel your prostate, a small gland near your bladder that can sometimes cause urinary problems. The DRE helps your healthcare provider check for any problems with the prostate that could be contributing to your symptoms.
- Your digital rectal exam will be done in a private room. You will be asked to change (in privacy) and sit or lay on the exam bed. You will be provided with a gown or sheet to cover yourself. When your healthcare provider comes in, they will discuss the symptoms you are experiencing and describe the DRE procedure. You may be offered a chaperone like a nurse or a support person who is at the appointment with you. If a chaperone is not offered and you would like to have one, please let your healthcare provider know before the test.

- For the DRE procedure, you will be placed in a position that will make the exam easier and more comfortable for you. Once you are ready, your healthcare provider will gently insert a gloved and lubricated finger into your anus and they will feel for anything that may not be normal. This exam may be a little uncomfortable, but it is important for understanding what might be causing your LUTS and helping your healthcare team find the right treatment for you.

What should I share with my healthcare provider?

- What impact is the health condition or issue is having on things that are important to you, like your job, hobbies and interests, and relationships?
- What has worked for you in the past to manage your current condition?
- What types of things help you work better with your healthcare team and what do you expect and need from the relationship with your healthcare provider?

There are lots of things in your life that can impact your ability to manage your health, like:

- Problems with money, housing, and access to transportation
- Alcohol or drug use
- Not enough support or help
- Childhood experiences

It's important to talk about these things with your healthcare provider because they all play a role in your health and well-being.

You are the most important part of your healthcare team.

If you don't understand what your healthcare team is telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest. You might say:

"This is new to me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"

"It sounded like you said that I should… Did I understand that correctly?"

"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"

Helpful tools and resources

- Making the most of your appointment: myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888
- Working with your healthcare team: hqca.ca/info

Get your tests

Here's an explanation of some tests your healthcare provider might use to check for causes of lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS):

Urinalysis:

- A urinalysis is a test where you provide a sample of your urine. The sample is checked for things like infection, blood, or other things that could be causing problems with your urinary system. This test helps your healthcare team understand if there is an infection or other issues affecting your bladder or kidneys.

Blood tests:

- **Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR) and Creatinine**: These tests help your healthcare team check how well your kidneys are working. If your kidneys aren't working properly, it could be because of LUTS. GFR measures how much blood your kidneys filter every minute, and creatinine levels show if your kidneys are filtering waste as they should.

- **Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA):** PSA is a blood test that measures the level of a substance called prostate-specific antigen, which is produced by the prostate gland. If your PSA levels are high, it might indicate an enlarged or inflamed prostate or prostate cancer. Your healthcare team may recommend this test if they suspect prostate problems are contributing to your LUTS.

Kidney and bladder ultrasound:

- Not every patient will need an ultrasound. An ultrasound uses sound waves to create pictures of your kidneys and bladder. Your healthcare team may recommend this test to check for problems that could be affecting your urinary system.

Review your test results

It is important to know your test results and what they mean for you personally. Take time to discuss your results with your healthcare provider. Medical terms can be hard to understand. And even common words like "positive" or "negative" might mean something different for medical tests. Ask your healthcare provider for explanations and examples to make sure you fully understand.

You might ask:

"What does this mean for me?"

"Is there a current concern? If so, what is it?"

It's important to talk to your healthcare provider right away:

- **If you notice blood in your urine**
- **If you cannot urinate at all**

Helpful tools and resources

You may find some of your results and health information using secure online tools:

MyHealth Records

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords.

MyAHS Connect

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Ask your healthcare provider how to access your MyAHS Connect account. Learn more at ahs.ca/myahsconnect.

Review your treatment, management & prevention options

Managing lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) requires a personalized approach based on the type and severity of your symptoms. While specific treatments are available for each type of symptom, making lifestyle and behavior changes is important for everyone when appropriate. Here are some steps that can help:

- **Keep a voiding diary**: Track when and how often you urinate. This can help you and your doctor understand your symptoms better and see how things change over time, making it easier to determine what works for you.
- **Dietary recommendations**: A balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins can help improve your overall health.
- **Stop or reduce smoking:** Nicotine can increase the frequency and urgency of urination, leading to more discomfort. Smoking also affects blood flow, which can make it harder for your body to function normally, including in the areas involved in urination.
- **Limit certain drinks**: Limiting caffeine, alcohol, and fizzy drinks can help reduce your LUTS symptoms. These drinks can make LUTS worse so small changes in what you drink can often improve your symptoms.
- **Bladder training**: If you have symptoms of an overactive bladder, bladder training may help. Your healthcare team may also give you tips on how much to drink and when.
- **Using pads or incontinence products**: Using pads or incontinence products can help you manage leakage, offering comfort and confidence while you explore treatment options for LUTS.
- **Physical activity**: Regular exercise can improve bladder control and reduce symptoms. Activities like walking, swimming, or cycling are great for overall health and can ease pressure on your bladder.
- **Weight management**: Keeping a healthy weight can reduce pressure on your bladder, making symptoms less severe. Staying active and eating a balanced diet can help with weight management and improve your health.

Making these lifestyle changes can greatly improve your symptoms and quality of life. Be sure to work closely with your healthcare team to find the best plan for you.

Medications:

Different medications can help manage lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) based on the type and severity of your symptoms. Here's how different medications may be used:

- **Alpha-blockers**: These medications are often used if you have symptoms like a weak urine stream or difficulty starting urination. They work by relaxing the muscles in the prostate and bladder neck, making it easier to urinate.
- **5-alpha reductase inhibitors**: If you have an enlarged prostate, these medications can help shrink the prostate and improve urine flow over time. They are often used for men with moderate to severe symptoms of an enlarged prostate. They can take up to 6 months to work.
- **Antimuscarinics**: For symptoms of an overactive bladder, such as urinary urgency or urgency incontinence, antimuscarinics help by controlling bladder sensations, reducing the urge to go.
- **Beta-3 agonists**: These medications can help treat overactive bladder by reducing the intensity of bladder sensations, allowing it to store more urine and reduce the frequency of urination.
- **Diuretics**: Sometimes, if you get up at night frequently, your doctor may recommend a diuretic in the late afternoon to help your body get rid of excess fluid in the day, which can reduce nighttime urination (nocturia).
- **PDE5 inhibitors**: These medications, commonly used to treat erectile dysfunction, can also help with LUTS. PDE5 inhibitors work by relaxing the muscles in the prostate and bladder, which can improve symptoms like difficulty urinating or incomplete bladder emptying. They may be used in men who have both LUTS and erectile dysfunction.

Your healthcare team will choose the right medication based on your specific symptoms, overall health, and how severe your LUTS are. It's important to follow your healthcare team's instructions and discuss any side effects or concerns.

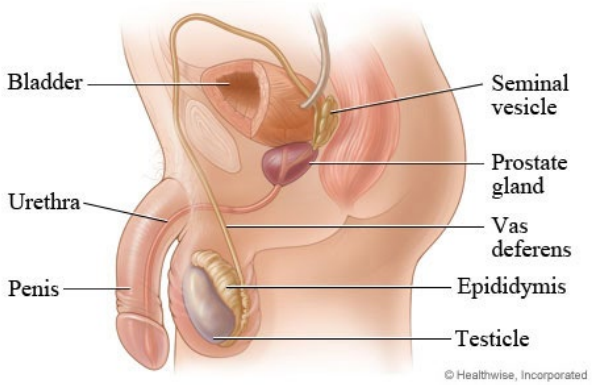
Some patients may want to explore surgical options instead of medicine to avoid potential side effects. Some of these treatments may not be covered by Alberta Health Care, and you may need to pay for them. In some cases, you may also need to travel outside of Alberta for the treatments. Talk with your healthcare team to see what might be best for you.

Pelvic floor physiotherapy:

- Pelvic floor physiotherapy may be a helpful option depending on your LUTS symptoms.
- This type of therapy focuses on strengthening and relaxing the muscles of the pelvic floor, which can improve bladder control, reduce urgency, and help with other urinary symptoms.
- It can address issues like incontinence, weak urinary stream, or difficulties with bladder emptying.
- A referral to physiotherapy is not required, but only certain physiotherapists have the training to perform pelvic health assessment, diagnosis and treatment. Please note that **not** all pelvic floor therapy treatments are covered by Alberta Health Care, so there may be additional costs involved.
- You can also access free pelvic floor webinars. Find more information and register here: https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/Pelvic-Health-Physiotherapy-Webinars.aspx

Urethral milking:

- Urethral milking is a technique that can help some people with LUTS, particularly those who have trouble emptying their bladder completely. It involves gently pressing or massaging the area near the base of the penis to help release any urine that may be stuck in the urethra.



- To do it:
  1. After urinating, wait a few seconds to let your bladder finish emptying.
  2. Place your fingertips about 3 finger widths behind the scrotum, then gently massage forward and upward towards the base of the penis, beneath the scrotum.
  3. This technique helps push any remaining urine into the tube from the bladder to the outside, where it can be emptied by shaking or squeezing as usual.
  4. Repeat the process twice to ensure the urethra is fully emptied.
  5. Finally, tighten your pelvic floor muscles strongly (hold for up to 10 seconds), then relax. This can help prevent any post-urination dribbling.

Asking the following questions can help you make an informed decision about your different treatment options and decide which one(s) will work best for you:

"What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?"

"Can I use any of these options together?"

"How will this make me feel? Will it have side effects?"

"What results can I expect?"

Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral

Not all patients with LUTS need a referral, but depending on the type of symptoms and how bad the symptoms are, your healthcare team may refer you to a urologist.

- A urologist is a medical specialist who focuses on helping patients with diseases and conditions of the male and female urinary systems, as well as the male reproductive system.
- Your urologist will assess you and your condition and recommend what treatment is best for you and your needs.

You can find out more about the referral criteria for a specialist by asking your healthcare provider.

Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, check out the Quality Referral Evolution (QuRE) Patient and Caregiver Journal by visiting ahs.ca/qure.

Start your treatment & watch your symptoms

As you try the treatment options you chose, remember that if something doesn't work the way you thought it would, think about other options and talk to your healthcare provider to find a treatment that will work for you.

Remember, for any of these signs, it's important to talk to a doctor right away:

- **If you notice blood in your urine**
- **If you cannot urinate at all**

Watching your symptoms is important. Call your healthcare provider or Health Link at 811 if you have any concerns. You might feel like you don't want to bother your healthcare team, but no detail is too small to share. If it matters to you, it will matter to your healthcare team.

You can clarify with your healthcare team what to expect in terms of follow-up communication. Connect with your healthcare team whenever you:

- Have questions
- Notice your symptoms getting worse
- Have problems with your medicine

Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialing **811**.

Keep taking care of yourself

There are many different things that can impact your health and wellness. It is important to be able to work with your healthcare team to decide what is best for you, given your own unique circumstances as you manage LUTS.

Remember, you don't need to do everything all at once. Take realistic and manageable steps in your health and wellness. Consider why making a change may benefit you and the things that matter to you.

Helpful tools and resources

Find programs and resources in your community:

211 connects Albertans to the programs and resources they need, anytime, day or night. Whether you're looking for help with mental health, financial assistance, basic needs or other challenges, 211 is here to help you find supports. It's free, confidential, and available in over 170 languages by phone, making it easy to access help when you need it.

To connect with 211 Alberta:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Chat or search at ab.211.ca

The **Alberta Healthy Living Program** offers free workshops, classes, and supervised exercise and nutrition services to adults living with a variety of chronic conditions and diseases. Many education classes and workshops are available province wide. Learn more by visiting ahs.ca/ahlp.

Chronic Disease Management support: ahs.ca/cdm

Health information & tools: myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx

Resources

There's lots of information out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

Helpful tip

If you can't print this resource at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider to print it for you. You can also use a computer and printer at your local library.

Get help now:

- Emergency: Call 911
- Health Link: Call 811

Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:

- 811 or Addiction Helpline: 1-866-332-2322
- 811 or Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: Call 988, or visit talksuicide.ca
- Office of Mental Health Patient Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx

Community and social supports:

- 211 Alberta: Call 211, or visit ab.211.ca
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit alberta.ca/income-support.aspx

Alberta Health Services programs:

- Home Care: ahs.ca/homecare
- Find a Dietitian: ahs.ca/nutrition
  - Health Link has dietitians to answer nutrition questions. Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete the self-referral form on ahs.ca/811.
- Spiritual Care Services: ahs.ca/spiritualcare

Primary care (family doctors):

- Find a doctor: ahs.ca/findadoctor
- Virtual care guide: ahs.ca/virtualhealth

Patient concerns and feedback:

- Office of Alberta Health Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx
  - Offers coaching to help you advocate for yourself in the health system, and support to learn how the health system works and how to navigate through it.
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit ahs.ca/patientfeedback

Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Notes

Use this space to take notes.

Background

About this Pathway

The Provincial Pathways Unit co- developed this patient pathway in partnership with patient and family advisors, primary care providers and specialty care providers (urologists and geriatricians) in Alberta.

It is current as of March 2025.

Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including urologists, gerontologists, primary care providers and patient and family advisors from across Alberta.

Pathway Review Process

Patient pathways undergo scheduled review every three years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is March 2028. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please send us your feedback here, or email comments to albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca.

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Disclaimer

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated healthcare providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice or professional competence.