

What to Think About in the Rest Room

I ran across a piece of information a few months ago that changed my life, and I'm betting it will change yours. Not necessarily in a good way.

Here it is: The average mammal – no matter the size – takes approximately 21 seconds to void its bladder. I know, this may not appear to be a life-changing revelation at first.

In 2013 a group of physicists from Georgia Tech University spent a lot of time at Zoo Atlanta observing various mammals with regard to the “hydrodynamics of urination” and discovered a remarkable consistency despite large variations in bladder size. Using high-speed fluid dynamics videos and flow-rate measurements they formulated the “Law of Urination”, which states animals empty their bladders over a nearly constant duration averaging 21 seconds, despite a difference in bladder volume that included critters even smaller than a cat (5 milliliters) and as large as an elephant (18 liters).

So how did this change my life? When you think about it, there's really not a whole lot to do when standing at a urinal in the men's room, except trying to avoid catching anyone else's eye. Occasionally there will be some kind of advertising posted eight inches in from my nose that I can't focus on anyway.

Ever since I learned about the 21 seconds, as soon as I initiate a stream I can't help counting to myself just to see where I end up. Before too long I began estimating what that number would be even before I walked into the restroom.

“Well,” I'd say to myself, “I've had two cups of coffee and had to wait to use the only men's room, so this one will be a high-volume 25.” Or (if you listen to your mother) you may be one of those people who never miss the opportunity to use a restroom; sometimes you'll go in knowing you'll be in the single digits.

In the men's room, I'll often be standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a dozen other guys all kind of whistling to themselves and staring at the ceiling or concentrating on their personal plumbing and the task at hand. With knowledge of the 21 second rule, they'd at least have something else to do, and maybe even exit with a feeling of accomplishment.

By the way, if you ever feel like making a someone nervous in the men's room, get in line behind a guy using a urinal when there are obviously many adjacent urinals unoccupied.

Seeing as how the 21-rule holds true for both males and females, it now bothers me that I know only a handful of women who can get in and out of a restroom nearly as quickly as a male. Even allowing for the extra mechanics involved, this process is not occurring quickly enough; something else must be going on in there.

I've concluded that there's some activity or attraction in all ladies' restrooms that precipitates extra visits and occupies extra time, as evidenced by the frequent long lines waiting to get in. They all seem to be sworn to secrecy about it; ask any of them what took so long, and they'll change the subject.

Anyway, the 21-second guideline seems to be accurate, if my own observations count for anything. At first I thought that my advanced age and weakening water pressure might alter this figure, but that variable seems to be offset by a decreasing bladder capacity.

Oddly, while doing my research on this topic I ran across another statistic indicating that 21 seconds is also the average amount of time it takes to recite the Lord's Prayer. If you're so inclined, you could use this method to measure your capacity in a manner that couldn't possibly damage your chances for salvation. For reference, when you get to "debts" or "trespasses" you should be halfway done.

Now that you know all of this, good luck using a restroom without starting the count towards 21. You can thank me later.

Writer's Group Member Dave Parsons is determined to see the inside of a women's restroom someday.