Top Champ Plumbing
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TOP CHAMP HOMEOWNER GUIDES

Running Toilet Troubleshooting

Use these checks to describe the problem and choose a safe next step. They do not identify every fault or replace a plumbing assessment.

For a conventional gravity-flush toilet with an accessible tank. For pressure-assisted, concealed-tank, tankless or powered toilets, follow the model's instructions or ask a plumber; do not open pressure vessels or electrical covers.

1. Water outside the toilet, a visible crack, or a rising bowl?

YES - Stop using it. Do not flush or do the dye test. Keep clear of wastewater and electrical hazards. If safely accessible and familiar, close the toilet's supply valve; do not force it. Get plumbing help.

NO - Continue to question 2.

2. Is it a conventional gravity tank you can safely inspect?

YES - Lift the heavy lid only if comfortable; place it flat on a secure surface. Observe without dismantling or adjusting parts. Continue to question 3.

NO - Skip the tank checks. Note the model and symptoms, and use manufacturer guidance or contact a plumber.

3. Does water keep running or restart between uses?

YES - Note constant running versus occasional refilling. Look for water entering the upright overflow tube after refilling should have stopped. Try the dye test on page 2 if appropriate.

NO - Record when the symptom happens. A quiet toilet now does not rule out an intermittent leak. If the problem returns, seek an assessment.

Why it can keep running

On many tank toilets, a worn flush-valve seal can let water escape into the bowl. A fill-valve or water-level problem can also cause running. Similar symptoms can have different causes; a dye result does not identify the exact part.

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Dye Test & Symptom Notes

Follow page 1 first. Print this worksheet and keep your observations with the toilet model details.

A simple tank-to-bowl dye test

- [ ] Use only after the bowl drains normally and question 1 is NO. Follow your toilet and dye product instructions; skip the test if either advises against it.
- [ ] Add a few drops of food coloring or an appropriate leak-detection dye tablet to the tank water, not the bowl. Do not add cleaners or mix chemicals.
- [ ] Wait 10 minutes without flushing. Check whether color appears in the bowl. Flush promptly afterward to reduce staining; replace the lid carefully.

DID COLOR APPEAR IN THE BOWL?

YES - Color in the bowl without flushing indicates a tank-to-bowl leak. Arrange an assessment or follow model-specific repair guidance; do not assume a generic replacement part will fit.

NO - No color means no leak was detected by this test at that time. Persistent running, intermittent refilling or visible water still needs attention.

Repair or replacement?

Repair may suit an otherwise sound toilet with a confirmed, repairable fault and compatible parts. Discuss replacement when the fixture is damaged, faults recur, suitable parts are unavailable, or fit and performance no longer meet your needs. A new toilet will not automatically fix a drainage problem.

If several fixtures are slow or backing up, stop testing and report that too. Do not tighten mounting bolts, lift the toilet, disconnect supply lines or attempt internal repairs as part of this checklist.

MY OBSERVATIONS

Bathroom / toilet model: _____

Date / test result / constant or occasional: _____

Other symptoms / questions for the plumber: _____

References (click to open):

EPA WaterSense - Home Maintenance
EPA WaterSense - Fix a Leak Week
KOHLER - Occasional Leaking or Running