

OTTAWA PRO PLUMBING

Toilets

Running, clogged, and leaking toilets, plus
replacement and installation

13 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

ottawaplumbingpro.ca/construction-brain

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What is a dual flush toilet?

A dual flush toilet is a water-efficient toilet design that gives you two flushing options: a lower-volume flush for liquid waste and a higher-volume flush for solid waste.

How It Works

The mechanism is straightforward. Instead of a single flush button or handle, dual flush toilets have two buttons (usually on top of the tank) or a split handle. The **half flush** typically uses around 3 litres of water, while the **full flush** uses around 6 litres. Traditional single-flush toilets often use 6 litres per flush regardless of need, so the savings add up quickly in a busy household.

Water Savings in Practice

Since the majority of daily flushes are for liquid waste, most households end up using the half flush 70-80% of the time. This can translate to **30-40% less water used** for toilet flushing overall. In Ottawa, where water rates have been climbing steadily, this makes a noticeable difference on your utility bill over the course of a year. Dual flush toilets are also a smart choice for homeowners looking to meet modern water efficiency standards.

Ottawa-Specific Context

The City of Ottawa has historically offered rebate programs for water-efficient toilet upgrades, so it's worth checking the **City of Ottawa's water conservation rebate page** before purchasing to see if any current incentives apply. Most dual flush toilets sold in Canada meet or exceed the **WaterSense** certification standard, which is a reliable benchmark to look for when shopping.

Installation Considerations

Replacing an existing toilet with a dual flush model is a relatively straightforward job. A licensed plumber can typically complete the swap in under two hours, and in Ottawa you generally don't need a permit for a simple **like-for-like toilet replacement** — though your plumber can confirm this for your specific situation. Expect to pay roughly **\$300 - \$500** for supply and installation in the Ottawa market, depending on the fixture you choose.

If you're renovating a bathroom or replacing an aging toilet, a dual flush model is one of the easiest upgrades you can make for both efficiency and long-term savings. Ottawa Pro Plumbing can help with selection and installation — feel free to reach out for a free estimate.

Why does my toilet rock back and forth?

A rocking toilet is almost always caused by a **loose or failed wax ring seal** at the base, or **loose floor bolts** (called closet bolts) that anchor the toilet to the floor flange. This is something you'll want to address promptly — a rocking toilet can cause serious water damage if left alone.

The most common culprit is simply that the two bolts at the base of your toilet have loosened over time. You can try tightening the plastic caps at the base of the toilet, removing them and snugging up the nuts underneath with a wrench. Be careful not to overtighten — porcelain cracks easily. If the toilet stops rocking after this, you may be in the clear.

If tightening the bolts doesn't fix it, the problem is likely a **damaged or compressed wax ring**. The wax ring creates a watertight seal between the toilet and the drain flange in your floor. When a toilet rocks repeatedly, it breaks that seal — and a broken wax ring means sewer gases and even sewage water can leak under your floor, causing rot, mold, and structural damage that's far more expensive to fix than the original problem.

A third possibility is an uneven floor or a damaged floor flange. Older Ottawa homes — especially those with tile or vinyl flooring that's been replaced over the years — sometimes have floors that aren't perfectly level around the toilet. In this case, plastic toilet shims can stabilize the toilet before the wax ring is replaced.

In Ottawa, a toilet reseal (wax ring replacement) typically runs **\$200 – \$400** depending on the condition of the flange and whether any subfloor damage is found. If the floor flange itself is cracked or sitting too low, that adds to the repair cost.

Don't ignore a rocking toilet. Even a small amount of movement is enough to slowly break the wax seal. Watch for soft or discoloured flooring around the base, a musty smell, or water stains — these are signs the seal is already compromised.

If tightening the bolts doesn't solve the rocking, it's worth having a plumber pull the toilet, inspect the flange, and install a fresh wax ring. For a free estimate on your repair, feel free to reach out to **Ottawa Pro Plumbing** — it's a straightforward job that protects you from much bigger problems down the road.

Q3

What is the best toilet brand?

The **"best" toilet brand depends on your priorities**, but a few manufacturers consistently stand out for quality, reliability, and availability in the Ottawa market.

TOTO is widely considered the gold standard by plumbers and consumers alike. Their toilets feature powerful flushing technology (the Tornado Flush system), excellent water efficiency, and exceptional durability. Models like the TOTO Drake and Ultramax are workhorses that rarely need service calls. The downside is cost — TOTO toilets typically run \$400–\$900+ before installation.

Kohler is another top-tier choice and arguably the most popular brand in Canadian homes. They offer a wide range of styles and price points, parts are easy to source in Ottawa, and their mid-range models like the Kohler Cimarron deliver excellent performance. For most Ottawa homeowners, Kohler hits the sweet spot of quality and value.

American Standard is a reliable workhorse brand, especially their Champion 4 model, which is known for an exceptionally powerful flush and clog resistance. It's a great budget-friendly option without sacrificing too much quality.

For Ottawa homeowners specifically, parts availability matters — if something needs repair down the road, you want a brand carried by local suppliers. Kohler and American Standard are stocked at most Ottawa plumbing suppliers and big box stores, making future repairs faster and cheaper.

A few practical tips: Look for toilets with a **WaterSense certification** (4.8L per flush or less), which meets Ontario's water efficiency standards. Avoid ultra-cheap no-name brands — the internal components wear out quickly and can be impossible to find parts for.

When it comes to installation, a proper wax ring seal and level setting are critical to prevent leaks — something that's easy to get wrong on a DIY install. Ottawa Pro Plumbing installs toilets starting around **\$300–\$500 all-in**, including the new wax ring and supply line. If you'd like a free estimate or help choosing the right model for your bathroom, feel free to reach out.

Q4

How do I stop my toilet from sweating?

Toilet sweating occurs when warm, humid air contacts the cold surface of your toilet tank, causing condensation to form and drip onto your bathroom floor. This is especially common in Ottawa during humid summer months when there's a big temperature difference between the cold water in your tank and the warm bathroom air.

The most effective solution is to **install a toilet tank liner** or insulation kit. These foam liners attach to the inside walls of your toilet tank, creating a barrier that prevents the cold tank surface from directly contacting the warm air. You can find these kits at most hardware stores for \$15-30, and they're relatively easy to install yourself by draining the tank, cleaning the surfaces, and adhering the foam pieces.

Reducing bathroom humidity is equally important for preventing toilet sweating. Run your exhaust fan during and after showers, ensure proper ventilation, and consider using a dehumidifier if your bathroom consistently feels muggy. In Ottawa's climate, this is particularly helpful during summer months when humidity levels spike.

For a more permanent solution, especially if you're renovating, consider installing a **mixing valve** that slightly warms the water entering your toilet tank. This reduces the temperature differential that causes condensation. However, this requires plumbing modifications and should be done by a licensed plumber to ensure proper installation and compliance with Ontario Building Code requirements.

If toilet sweating is causing water damage to your flooring or the problem persists despite these measures, it's worth having a plumber assess whether there are underlying ventilation or plumbing issues contributing to the problem.

Q5

Should I get a round or elongated toilet?

Elongated toilets are generally the better choice for most Ottawa homes, offering superior comfort and performance, though round toilets work well in tight spaces.

Elongated toilets provide better comfort and functionality. The longer bowl (about 2 inches more than round) offers more seating area and better waste removal efficiency. Most adults find elongated toilets significantly more comfortable, and they're easier to clean thoroughly. The extra length also reduces splashing and provides better hygiene overall.

Round toilets are mainly chosen for space constraints. If your bathroom is tight on space, a round toilet saves those crucial 2 inches. They're also typically \$50-100 less expensive than elongated models. However, the comfort difference is noticeable, especially for taller users or anyone spending more than a quick moment on the toilet.

In Ottawa's housing market, elongated toilets are preferred in most installations. New construction and renovations typically specify elongated models because they're seen as a standard comfort feature. Most quality toilet manufacturers focus their best features and designs on elongated models. The resale value consideration also favors elongated toilets in Ottawa homes.

Consider your bathroom layout and user preferences. Measure your space carefully - you need at least 30 inches from the toilet center to any wall or fixture. If you have the space, elongated is usually worth the investment. For powder rooms or very small bathrooms, round toilets can be the practical choice.

Professional installation ensures proper fit and function regardless of style. Both types require the same installation process, including proper sealing and secure mounting. For a free estimate on toilet replacement in your Ottawa home, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can help you choose the right model and handle the complete installation.

Q6

Why is my toilet leaking at the base?

A toilet leaking at the base is typically caused by a failed wax ring seal between the toilet and the floor drain, though it could also indicate loose bolts or a cracked toilet base. This is a common issue that requires prompt attention to prevent water damage to your flooring and subfloor.

The **wax ring** is a donut-shaped seal that sits between your toilet and the toilet flange (the pipe connection in your floor). Over time, this ring can deteriorate, shift, or compress, breaking the watertight seal. When this happens, water from each flush can seep out around the base. You might notice water pooling around the toilet, especially after flushing, or detect a sewage odor in your bathroom.

Loose toilet bolts can also cause base leaking. These bolts secure your toilet to the floor flange, and if they become loose over time, the toilet can rock slightly with use. This movement can break the wax ring seal or create gaps where water can escape. You can check this by gently trying to rock the toilet - if it moves, the bolts likely need tightening.

In Ottawa homes, this problem is particularly common in older houses where settling can affect the toilet flange level, or in homes with original wax rings that are 15+ years old. **Temperature fluctuations** during Ottawa's harsh winters can also cause expansion and contraction that affects the seal over time.

Don't ignore this leak - even small amounts of water can cause significant damage to subflooring, especially in Ottawa's climate where moisture can lead to mold issues. The repair typically involves removing the toilet, replacing the wax ring, and reinstalling the toilet properly. This job requires ensuring the toilet flange is level and in good condition, which often reveals additional issues that need professional attention.

While tightening loose bolts is a simple DIY task, replacing a wax ring requires removing and reinstalling the toilet, which can be tricky and messy. If done incorrectly, you risk damaging the toilet or creating a worse leak. For a reliable repair and to ensure your toilet is properly sealed, consider getting a free estimate from Ottawa Pro Plumbing - we handle these repairs regularly and can spot any underlying issues with your toilet flange or flooring.

Q7

Can I install a toilet myself?

Yes, you can install a toilet yourself if you're comfortable with basic plumbing tasks, but there are important considerations for Ottawa homeowners. Most DIY-capable homeowners can handle a straightforward toilet replacement, but new installations or significant plumbing changes typically require permits and professional work.

For a simple toilet replacement where you're swapping an old toilet for a new one in the same location, this is generally a manageable DIY project. You'll need basic tools like an adjustable wrench, screwdriver, level, and new wax ring. The process involves shutting off water, removing the old toilet, cleaning the flange, installing a new wax ring, and carefully setting the new toilet. The key is ensuring a proper seal with the wax ring and that all connections are tight to prevent leaks.

However, toilet installation becomes more complex if you're moving the toilet location, installing in a new bathroom, or dealing with flange repairs. These situations often require permits in Ottawa and may involve moving drain lines or electrical work for bathroom fans. The Ontario Building Code has specific requirements for toilet placement, ventilation, and drainage that must be followed.

Water damage is the biggest risk with DIY toilet installation. A improperly sealed toilet can leak sewage under your floor, causing thousands in damage and health hazards. If you're not confident about achieving a watertight seal or if you discover issues like a damaged flange or uneven floor during the project, it's worth calling a professional.

For Ottawa homeowners, consider that a licensed plumber can typically install a toilet in 1-2 hours for \$300-\$500, which includes proper disposal of the old unit and ensuring code compliance. For a free estimate on your toilet installation project, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing.

Q8

What causes a toilet to clog frequently?

Frequent toilet clogs are usually caused by a combination of what's being flushed and underlying plumbing issues that restrict water flow or trap debris.

The most common culprit is **flushing inappropriate items** like excessive toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, wet wipes (even "flushable" ones), cotton swabs, or dental floss. Many people don't realize that modern low-flow

toilets use significantly less water than older models, so they can't handle the same volume of material. Even too much toilet paper at once can overwhelm the system.

Partial blockages in your drain line create ongoing problems where waste doesn't fully clear with each flush, building up over time. This often happens when tree roots infiltrate sewer lines, or when mineral deposits and debris accumulate in older pipes. In Ottawa's clay soil conditions, root intrusion is particularly common in homes with mature trees near sewer lines.

Toilet design issues can also contribute to frequent clogs. Older low-flow toilets from the 1990s often lack sufficient flushing power, while toilets with poorly designed trap ways create turbulence that prevents waste from clearing properly. Hard water, common in parts of Ottawa, can cause mineral buildup that narrows the toilet's internal passages over time.

If your toilet clogs more than once a month, it's worth having a **camera inspection** of your drain line to identify any underlying blockages or damage. A licensed plumber can also assess whether your toilet itself is the problem or if there are issues with your home's drain system. Simple solutions might include upgrading to a more powerful toilet or clearing accumulated debris, while more serious problems could require drain cleaning or pipe repair.

For persistent clogging issues that simple plunging won't resolve, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers camera inspections and drain cleaning services to identify and fix the root cause.

Q9

Why does my toilet bowl empty slowly?

A slowly emptying toilet bowl is typically caused by a partial blockage in the drain or issues with the toilet's flushing mechanism. The most common culprits are buildup in the trap, rim jets, or the drain line leading from your toilet.

Partial blockages are the leading cause of slow-draining toilets. Over time, toilet paper, waste, and mineral deposits can accumulate in the toilet's trap (the curved section at the base) or further down the drain line. Unlike a complete blockage that prevents flushing entirely, partial obstructions allow water to pass through slowly, creating that frustrating slow-drain effect.

Clogged rim jets under the toilet bowl rim can also cause poor flushing performance. These small holes direct water into the bowl during flushing, and when they're blocked by mineral buildup or debris, the toilet can't generate enough force to clear the bowl efficiently. You might notice weak water flow or uneven water distribution during flushing.

In Ottawa's hard water areas, mineral buildup is particularly common and can affect both rim jets and internal toilet components. The high mineral content in our water supply can create deposits that gradually reduce water flow and flushing power over time.

Start with simple solutions like using a toilet plunger or toilet auger to clear potential blockages in the trap. For rim jet cleaning, you can use a wire coat hanger to gently clear the holes under the rim. However, if these steps don't resolve the issue, the blockage may be deeper in your drain line or you could have a more serious problem like tree root intrusion or pipe damage.

Call a professional plumber if the problem persists after basic troubleshooting, if you notice gurgling sounds, or if multiple fixtures are draining slowly - these signs often indicate issues in your main drain line that require professional diagnosis and clearing.

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Why does my toilet randomly run for a few seconds?

Your toilet is likely running randomly because the **flapper valve isn't sealing properly** against the flush valve seat, allowing water to slowly leak from the tank into the bowl. When the water level drops enough, the fill valve kicks in to refill the tank, creating that brief running sound you hear.

The most common culprit is a **warped or deteriorated flapper**. Over time, the rubber becomes flexible and can't create a tight seal, especially if mineral buildup or debris gets caught underneath it. Sometimes the flapper chain is too long or short, preventing proper closure, or the flush valve seat itself has developed rough spots that prevent sealing.

Water level issues can also cause random running. If your tank's water level is set too high, water continuously flows into the overflow tube. Conversely, if it's too low, the flapper may not have enough water weight to seal properly. The fill valve itself might be failing, causing erratic water level control.

In Ottawa's hard water areas, **mineral buildup** is particularly common and can interfere with flapper sealing or cause fill valve components to stick. This creates the intermittent running pattern many homeowners notice, especially at night when water usage is low and pressure changes are more noticeable.

Quick troubleshooting steps: Lift the toilet tank lid and check if the flapper is seating flat. Clean any debris from around the flush valve seat and ensure the chain has slight slack. If the flapper feels warped or sticky, it likely needs replacement - a simple fix that costs under \$10.

If cleaning and adjusting doesn't solve the random running, the fill valve assembly may need replacement. While this is a manageable DIY project, improper installation can lead to continuous running or inadequate flushing. For persistent issues or if you're uncomfortable with the repair, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can diagnose and fix toilet running problems quickly, preventing water waste and potential damage.

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Why does my toilet keep running?

A running toilet is typically caused by a faulty flapper, chain, or fill valve that prevents the toilet from completing its flush cycle properly. This wastes water and can increase your utility bill significantly.

The most common culprit is the **rubber flapper at the bottom of the tank** not sealing properly against the flush valve seat. Over time, flappers warp, crack, or accumulate mineral buildup that prevents a tight seal. When water continuously leaks from the tank into the bowl, the fill valve keeps running to maintain the water level.

Chain problems are another frequent cause. If the chain connecting the flush handle to the flapper is too long, the flapper won't lift fully during flushing. If it's too short or gets tangled, the flapper can't close completely. The chain should have just enough slack to allow the flapper to seat properly while still lifting it when you flush.

Fill valve issues can also cause continuous running. Older fill valves may stick in the open position, or the float mechanism might be set incorrectly. If the water level is set too high, it will continuously overflow into the overflow tube, triggering the fill valve to keep running.

In Ottawa's hard water areas, mineral buildup accelerates these problems. The high mineral content can cause flappers to deteriorate faster and create deposits that prevent proper sealing. Regular cleaning and maintenance can extend component life.

Simple fixes you can try include adjusting the chain length, cleaning around the flapper seat, or gently bending the float arm. However, if the flapper is warped or the fill valve is old, replacement parts are needed. Most toilet repair kits cost \$20-40 and can resolve multiple issues at once.

If basic adjustments don't solve the problem, or if you're uncomfortable working inside the toilet tank, a licensed plumber can quickly diagnose and fix the issue. **Running toilets waste hundreds of gallons monthly**, so prompt repair saves money on your water bill.

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How do I replace a toilet wax ring?

Replacing a toilet wax ring is a manageable DIY project that typically takes 2-3 hours and requires basic tools. You'll need a new wax ring, toilet bolts, and potentially a new toilet flange if the old one is damaged.

Start by shutting off the water supply at the valve behind the toilet and flushing to empty the tank and bowl. Remove the water supply line and unscrew the nuts holding the toilet to the floor bolts. Carefully lift the toilet straight up - it's heavy and awkward, so having a helper is wise. You'll immediately see the old wax ring on the toilet flange in the floor.

Scrape away all the old wax from both the toilet base and the floor flange using a putty knife. This is the messiest part of the job, but it's crucial to get all the old wax off for a proper seal. Inspect the toilet flange for cracks or damage - if it's broken, you'll need a plumber to replace it before proceeding.

In Ottawa's climate, standard wax rings work well, though some plumbers prefer wax rings with plastic funnels for better sealing on uneven floors common in older Ottawa homes. Place the new wax ring on the flange (not on the toilet), then carefully lower the toilet straight down onto the bolts. Press down firmly and rock slightly to compress the wax, then tighten the nuts evenly.

The biggest risk is improper sealing, which can cause water damage to your subfloor over time. If you're not confident about getting a watertight seal, or if you discover flange damage, it's worth having a licensed plumber handle the job. Many Ottawa homeowners find the lifting and precise positioning challenging, especially in tight bathroom spaces.

For a professional toilet installation or if you encounter complications, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers reliable service with proper cleanup and disposal of old components.

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How do I fix a toilet that won't flush properly?

A toilet that won't flush properly is usually caused by low water level in the tank, a clogged drain, or faulty internal components - most of these issues can be diagnosed and often fixed with basic troubleshooting.

Start by removing the toilet tank lid and checking the water level. The water should sit about 1 inch below the rim of the overflow tube. If it's too low, the flapper chain might be too long or broken, preventing the flapper from sealing properly. Adjust the chain so there's slight slack when the flapper is closed. If the water level is correct but the flush is weak, the rim holes under the toilet bowl rim might be clogged with mineral deposits - use a wire coat hanger or toilet brush to clear them.

Check the flapper and flush valve seat for warping or mineral buildup that prevents a tight seal. A warped flapper won't hold water in the tank, leading to weak flushes. The fill valve might also need adjustment if water runs continuously or the tank fills too slowly. In Ottawa's hard water areas, mineral buildup is common and can affect all these components.

If the toilet gurgles, drains slowly, or water backs up, you likely have a **drain blockage**. Try a plunger first - use a toilet plunger (with the extended flange) and create a good seal. Pump vigorously 10-15 times. For stubborn clogs, a toilet auger can reach deeper blockages that a plunger can't clear.

When to call a professional: If you've tried these steps and the problem persists, if water leaks from the base (indicating a wax ring failure), or if multiple fixtures in your home are backing up (suggesting a main line issue). Toilet replacement in Ottawa typically costs \$300-500 including installation, while most repairs run \$150-300.

For persistent flushing issues or if you're uncomfortable with these repairs, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can diagnose the problem quickly and provide a lasting solution.

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