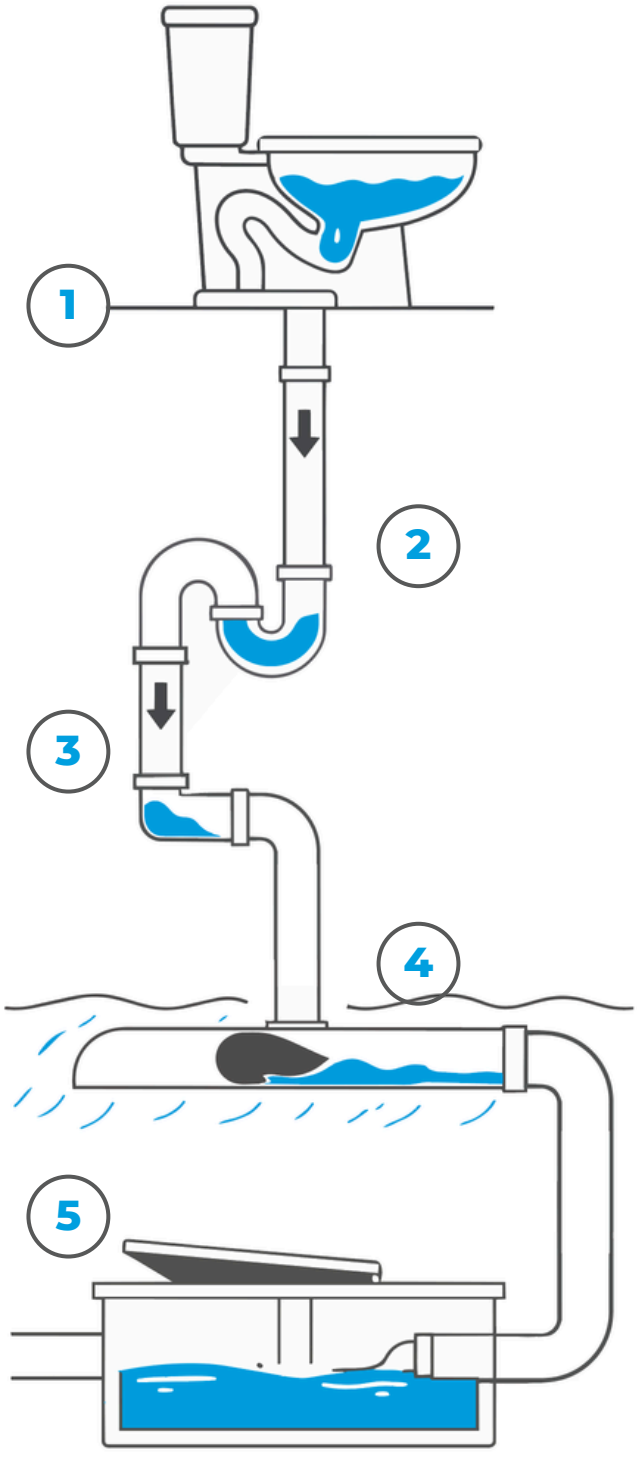
Follow Your Flush

It's easy to take your plumbing for granted. You flush the toilet, and everything disappears. But behind the scenes, there's a full system at work, and it only takes a small issue at one point to create a much bigger problem down the [sewer] line.



1. Toilet (Flush Initiation)

Everything starts at the flush. Water and waste are pushed from the bowl into the drain system using gravity and pressure. Most issues here come from what's being flushed. **Thicker toilet paper, paper towels, wipes, or hygiene products don't break down easily** and can create immediate resistance. Even if they make it out of the bowl, they often set the stage for problems further down the line.

2. P-Trap (Air & Water Seal)

The P-trap is designed to hold a small amount of water, creating a seal that blocks sewer gases from coming back into the home. While it's essential, it's also one of the first places where buildup can occur. **Debris, excessive paper, or sediment can collect here over time, narrowing the passage.** When that happens, flow slows down, and you may start to notice sluggish draining or minor backups.

3. Interior Drain Lines & 90-Degree Turns

As waste moves through the home's plumbing system, it travels through a series of horizontal pipes and directional changes, including 90-degree turns. These **bends are natural slow points in the system**. Heavier materials like thick toilet paper, grease residue, or non-flushable items tend to catch at these angles. Over time, this buildup can restrict flow enough to cause recurring clogs or full blockages.

4. Main Sewer Line (Leaving the Home)

Once outside the house, all wastewater enters the main sewer line. This is where small problems can turn into bigger ones. **Tree roots are a common issue** here, as they seek out moisture and can infiltrate tiny cracks in the pipe. In colder climates, **freezing ground can also constrict or shift pipes**. Any obstruction at this stage affects the entire home, often leading to multiple drains backing up at once.

5. Sewer or Septic Connection (Final Destination)

At the end of the line, wastewater flows into either a municipal sewer system or a septic tank. **Problems here are often related to capacity or system health**. A full or poorly maintained septic tank can cause backups into the home, while municipal systems can become overwhelmed or blocked. When issues occur at this final stage, they typically result in the **most noticeable and urgent backups**, since there's nowhere left for the water to go.