
Pelvic Health and Obstetric Physiotherapy Department

Urgency and Urge Incontinence

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for men or women who experience urgency or urge urinary incontinence

Urgency and urge incontinence

Urgency is a sudden compelling urge to go to the toilet. Sometimes with no warning, which may result in leaking before reaching the toilet (urge incontinence). Other symptoms may include frequency (going to the toilet more than seven to eight times a day) or waking frequently in the night to pass urine (nocturia).

When the bladder is working properly, the bladder muscle (detrusor) remains relaxed as the bladder gradually fills (a normal bladder can hold 400ml -600mls). When the bladder is about half full, we get a feeling of wanting to pass urine. Most people can hold on after this initial feeling until a convenient time to go to the toilet arises. However, if you are experiencing urgency and urge incontinence, the bladder may feel fuller than it actually is. This means that the bladder may contract too early when it is not very full and cause leakage of urine before reaching the toilet.

This leaflet is designed to give you tips and techniques to help to control your bladder function.

Reasons for symptoms may include:

- overactive bladder
- bladder infection
- prolapse
- bladder irritants (for example caffeine)
- fluid intake (too much or too little)
- mental stress
- constipation
- enlarged prostate (men)
- hormone changes (women)
- poor bladder habits
- diabetes

Bladder retraining

People with urgency often get into the habit of going to the toilet too often or 'just in case'. This can make urgency worse because the bladder gets used to holding less urine, causing it to shrink and to become more sensitive and overactive.

The aim of bladder training is to teach you how to control your bladder, instead of your bladder controlling you.

How to retrain your bladder

1. Keep a bladder diary

Complete a diary for three days measuring and recording the volume of fluids and urine that goes in and out of your body. See the bottom of this leaflet and speak to your physiotherapist for more information.

2. Learn to control urgency

When you feel the first signals from your bladder that you need to go; try to hold on and ignore the feeling.

You can do this by:

- Remaining calm and breathing slowly and deeply
- Distracting yourself by thinking of something else (for example, count backwards from 100)
- Do five quick squeezes of the pelvic floor muscles or a hold a contraction for as long as possible. Sit down on something firm and tap your feet
- Tightly cross your legs or sit on an arm of a chair
- In standing, try going up on tip toes and back down again a few times

Once you have done this the feeling should pass.

3. Delay going to the toilet

Start with your usual pattern but delay it by 5 or 10 minutes each time using the tips above. Once you have done this for a week, increase it to 15 or 20 minutes. If your bladder tells you it needs to go too soon, make it wait, it will not do your bladder any harm. At the start you may not be successful every time. Keep on with this technique and stay positive as it may be a few days before you see any improvement.

Timing of your drinks

If you are bothered by getting up in the night to empty your bladder you may wish to stop any fluids two hours before bedtime. As you get older your kidneys do not slow down at night and they can make nearly as much urine at night as they do during the day – this is why it is usual for an older person to get up once or twice in the night to empty their bladder.

Changing the type of fluid you drink

Drinks containing caffeine, alcohol, fresh fruit juice or any fizzy drinks may make you want to pass urine more frequently or more urgently. Try to reduce these over a few days. You should aim to replace these drinks with water, decaffeinated tea/coffee or fruit teas rather than reducing your fluid intake. Try to make this change over two weeks to decide if this has helped your symptoms.

Changing the volume of fluid you drink

Not drinking enough can make bladder symptoms worse. This is because the urine will be more concentrated and will irritate the lining of the bladder. Trying to drink between six to eight cups of fluid a day (1.5 – 2 litres) is an ideal amount for most people. Not drinking enough can also make you more likely to get a bladder infection and can cause constipation. Your urine should be a very pale straw colour.

Good bladder habits

- Try to make sure you empty your bladder fully; changing position or standing then sitting may help.
- Only visit the toilet when you really need to go.
- Empty your bladder no more than every two to three hours.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

Your physiotherapist can assess you and teach you pelvic floor muscle exercises. The pelvic floor muscles need to work properly to help control the bladder. Please see the pelvic floor muscle training leaflet and the pelvic floor muscle exercises video.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises video <https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/clinics/pelvic-health/>
Please scroll down to the video section of the webpage and select pelvic floor exercises video.

The NHS squeeze app is also a very good resource.

Stay positive

There may be good and bad days when you are trying to make changes. Try to stick with the advice and remember it may take a while. Certain things can make trying to control your bladder more difficult, for example:

- feeling run down or having a cold or flu
- having a bladder infection (see your GP if you think you do)
- if you feel stressed or anxious
- if you are a women, different times in your menstrual cycle

Medication

If the information given on this leaflet is not successful, people go on to try medication. Speak to your GP if you wish to try medication.

How to complete a bladder diary

This diary has been designed to help us to diagnose and treat urinary symptoms. It is important that you complete the diary over a three day period. You will need a measuring jug marked with millilitres to measure the urine you pass.

- Each time you drink; measure the quantity and using the code below record the type of drink and quantity consumed.
- Type of drink: C=Coffee, T=Tea, W=Water, J=Fruit juice, S=Squash, F=Fizzy drink, A=Alcohol.
- Each time you pass urine, measure the amount in the jug and record the amount. If you have been unable to measure the amount at any time, tick in the appropriate time box.
- If you leak urine please mark: + for a small amount, ++ for a moderate amount +++ for a large amount

FLUID VOLUME CHART									
TIME	Day one			Day two			Day three		
	Amount drunk	Amount passed	Leak? Y/N	Amount drunk	Amount passed	Leak? Y/N	Amount drunk	Amount passed	Leak? Y/N
E.g.	250ml C				500ml	Y ++		100ml	N
6.00 am									
7.00 am									
8.00 am									
9.00 am									
10.00 am									
11.00 am									
12.00 midday									
1.00 pm									
2.00 pm									
3.00 pm									
4.00 pm									
5.00 pm									
6.00 pm									
7.00 pm									
8.00 pm									
9.00 pm									
10.00 pm									
11.00 pm									
12.00 midnight									
1.00 am									
2.00 am									
3.00 am									
4.00 am									
5.00 am									

For further physiotherapy advice

For further advice you can leave a message for the Pelvic Health Physiotherapists on
01223 217422



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helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

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01223 256998.



<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/contact-us/accessible-information/>

Document history

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