

Bladder Training -

How to use your Pelvic Floor Muscles to Improve Bladder Control

What is bladder training?

Bladder training is a way of treating problems of urinary urgency and frequency.

What is the aim of bladder training?

The aim of bladder training is to 'train' the bladder to hold on. Over time you can gradually restore a more normal bladder emptying pattern by trying to ignore some of the signals from the bladder and by holding on for longer between visits to the toilet.

Some words it is helpful to know

Urgency is the really strong need to pass urine which if ignored, could cause a leak (urge incontinence).

Frequency is the need to empty the bladder with only a short time between visits to the toilet.

What causes urgency?

There are certain medical conditions which your GP or Consultant will want to exclude before you come for treatment.

Common problems contributing to symptoms are:

- Urinary tract infection / cystitis
- Some medications
- Certain drinks: tea, coffee, cola, alcohol, citrus
- Insufficient fluid intake
- Vaginal wall laxity / prolapse
- Constipation
- Hormonal changes
- Nicotine.

Sometimes, the exact cause of urgency is never found. The bladder just starts to behave urgently, which makes you anxious, which makes you go more, which makes it worse: so let's include 'anxiety' and going 'just in case' as well.

How can I help my bladder control?

It can be really helpful to use the pelvic floor muscles to help control any urgency and urge incontinence.

You will need to build up the length of time you can tighten these muscles with daily exercises. Your physiotherapist will be able to advise you on correct muscle work and give you an information leaflet on ways to strengthen the muscles.

Once you are able to build up some strength in the pelvic floor muscles, then you need to think about working them when your bladder is urgent or at times when it tends to let you down.

When is it important to tighten the pelvic floor muscles?

It is really important to try and tighten these muscles in anticipation of any situation where you feel that you may leak:

- Getting out of bed
- Getting closer to the toilet door
- In a toilet queue
- When running a tap
- Getting up from a chair
- Finding your door key when coming home
- Lifting heavy items.

How can bladder training help the bladder to function more normally?

The bladder functions best when it is given good volumes to hold. The more you go, the more you will have to go as your bladder gets used to holding less and less urine. If you always respond immediately to the bladder's signals or go 'just in case', your bladder can start to control how you manage your daily activities. Use of 'delaying tactics' can be helpful.

What delaying tactics can I use?

The following tactics may be helpful in delaying the urge to pass urine and in improving bladder control:

- Try to 'switch the bladder off' by tightening the muscles of the pelvic floor just a little. Try and maintain this low level tightening for a full 20 seconds. This is the most important delaying tactic.

You can also try:

- Standing still
- Standing on tip toes/ hopping from foot to foot
- Sitting on the hard arm of a chair/ on the corner of a wall
- Crossing your legs
- Adding a firm pressure by pressing your hands between your legs
- Mental distraction. Try the 8 times table!
- Toe scrunching - curl your toes under.

Building up time intervals between passing urine is not always easy. Check your watch when you pass urine and set yourself a realistic time to work towards. Remember the average time interval between passing urine is 3-4 hours depending on how much you are drinking. Try not to go to the toilet 'just in case'. If you try to improve the holding time of the bladder in the day you will inevitably improve your ability to hold on at night.

Do make sure you are sitting comfortably to pass urine in order that the bladder can empty fully.

Which drinks can irritate the bladder?

Tea, coffee and cola may irritate the bladder. These are stimulant drinks which will make the bladder fill quickly and can aggravate urge symptoms. Be cautious with citrus juices, fizzy drinks, diet drinks, alcohol and tomatoes. All of these could cause problems for the bladder. Some soap products can irritate the vaginal tissues and increase feelings of urgency.

What should I drink?

Water, herbal teas, squash and diluted juices are preferable to caffeine based drinks. Decaffeinated tea and coffee may also cause urgency and rapid bladder filling for some people, so plainer drinks are best.

How much should I drink?

It is advisable to have around eight drinks a day. That is roughly three pints or one and a half litres of fluid. Excessive fluid intake may in itself cause frequency but restricting fluids can make the urine concentrated and this too can irritate the bladder. It is a fine balance.

Expect setbacks if the weather is cold and rainy or when you are stressed or unwell. Some women can experience more symptoms around the time of their period.

Your physiotherapist will be able to talk you through all aspects of this leaflet and guide you on a pelvic floor exercise program when you attend the department for an appointment.

What should I do if I have further questions?

Should you have any concerns, please call your named physiotherapist, or leave a message for the Pelvic Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy Team:

Royal Sussex County Hospital: 01273 523050

Princess Royal Hospital: 01444 448664

Hove Polyclinic: 0300 304 0118

Further information:

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

www.continence-foundation.org.uk

Pelvic Obstetric Gynaecological Physiotherapists
pogp.csp.org.uk

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