

Bladder Retraining

Information and advice for patients

Sandwell Community Continence Service

What is bladder retraining?

Bladder retraining is a treatment for an overactive bladder; where people experience an urgent desire to pass urine and may need to go frequently. Bladder retraining is a therapy to help people learn to hold on to more urine in their bladder, so that they need fewer visits to the toilet. It is a 12 week programme and your progress may be monitored by a health professional.

How does the bladder work?

The bladder is a muscular sac that stores urine. As it fills it sends message via the nerves to the brain, the brain responds and send messages to the sphincter (the valve at the base of the bladder) to stay closed until a toilet is available. The bladder should:

- hold 200mls-500mls (1½–1 pint)
- empty four to seven times every 24 hours (including once at night)
- pass about 1500mls (3 pints) in 24 hours

What are the benefits of bladder retraining?

With your dedication bladder retraining can help to:

- Correct poor habits such as going to the toilet 'just in case'
- Reduce and control the urgent desire to pass urine
- Increase the time between visiting the toilet
- Reduce accidents i.e. 'wetting yourself'
- Increase the amount of urine passed each time

What are the risks of bladder retraining?

The risk of bladder retraining is that when you first start trying to retrain your bladder you may experience more urinary 'accidents'. There is also a risk that bladder retraining may not be effective. This is more likely if you are not dedicated to the programme so your nurse will give you encouragement, advice and support to help you as it is not always easy.

What are the risks of not doing bladder retraining?

If you decide to not perform bladder retraining, or are not dedicated in sticking to it, your symptoms will not improve.

Are there any alternatives?

Bladder retraining is the first line of treatment for an overactive bladder. If it is not effective then medication may be recommended in conjunction with bladder training. Your doctor/nurse will discuss this with you if it is appropriate.

How to retrain your bladder

For the first two to three days

Go to the toilet as you normally would and keep a record of the following information to identify the extent of your problem, this gives a baseline:

- How much you drink per day
- What you are drinking and when
- The time you go to the toilet and how much you pass by using a plastic measuring jug
- When you are having any leakage of urine

After two to three days

When you feel the need to empty your bladder, try to wait two to five minutes before going to the toilet. This will allow your bladder to stretch a little.

Continue to hold on for short periods of time. Over time, your bladder will stretch and be able to comfortably hold larger amounts of urine without discomfort. As your bladder gets used to holding more urine, it will need to be emptied less often.

When you have an urgent desire to pass urine:

- Stop and stay still
- Cross your legs
- Tighten your pelvic floor by doing a pelvic floor exercise
- Think of something else to take your mind off it
- Wait until the urge dies away
- Walk at a normal pace to the toilet

Other lifestyle changes that can help

Reduce your caffeine intake – Caffeine, which is found in tea, coffee, cola, and drinking chocolate, can irritate the bladder.

Reduce your alcohol intake – Alcohol causes your body to produce more urine as well as irritating the bladder.

Drink plenty of fluids – If you do not drink enough your urine will become concentrated, and this will irritate your bladder. Drink enough so your urine is pale straw colour.

Do not have more than 300mls (1 glass) of cranberry juice a day.

Do not hover over the toilet – This does not allow the bladder to empty fully. Sit properly on the toilet.

If you have a body mass/index (BMI) greater than 30 – trying to lose weight would be beneficial.

Practice pelvic floor exercises – Pelvic floor muscles help support your bladder. Poor muscles (often damaged by child birth or after prostate surgery) may result in leakage of urine. Practising pelvic floor muscle exercises regularly help strengthen them. Ask your nurse for advice and a pelvic floor exercises leaflet.

If you have regular urine infections or blood in your urine, seek medical advice.

Contact details

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact your community nurse or the Community Continence Service on:

0121 507 2664

Monday to Friday, from 8am–4pm

continence.team2@nhs.net

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website www.swbh.nhs.uk follow us on X @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

British Medical Journal, 'Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia', November 2001

British Medical Journal, 'Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia: Treatment in Primary Care', September 2006

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (2019) Urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse in women: management. (NG123) Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng123> [Accessed 01 October 2024].

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