

Patient information

The bladder training programme

Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy



What does this booklet cover?

This leaflet is designed to give you more information regarding how your bladder functions, tips for holding on and developing healthy bladder habits.

How the bladder works

Urine is collected and stored in the bladder which relaxes when filling and contracts when emptying.

As it fills, a message is sent from the brain to the bladder to empty at an appropriate time.

People with feelings of needing to go to the toilet urgently and quite often find that they get caught in a vicious cycle.

You may become over-sensitive to feelings of bladder fullness and tend to rush off to the lavatory at the first sensation of needing to go.

The bladder becomes accustomed to holding smaller & smaller amounts of urine and sends signals to the brain that it is full earlier and earlier. The more often you go, the more you need to go.

Worrying and rushing makes urgency worse and leakage of urine may occur. This condition is often described as having an 'overactive bladder'.

Continence issues

There are many reasons why you may leak urine:

Urge incontinence

Leakage of urine associated with a strong urge to pass urine. You may be unable to get to the toilet in time. This may be associated with putting your key in the door or running water. This can be caused by an overactive bladder or lack of co-ordination of your pelvic floor muscles. You may have the desire to go to the toilet many times in the day (frequency) or during the night (nocturia).

Stress Incontinence

Leakage of urine with coughing, sneezing or laughing etc. This often happens because the muscles around the bladder neck (pelvic floor muscles) maybe weak or damaged.

Mixed Leakage

Associated with urgency and with exertion / effort / sneezing / coughing.

Causes of Urinary Incontinence:

- Pregnancy
- Childbirth
- Constipation
- Persistent coughing
- Previous pelvic, abdominal or spinal surgeries
- Increased body weight or being over weight
- Persistent heavy lifting
- Menopause
- Natural aging

Facts and figures

Normal bladder size/volume = 400-600ml

Recommended fluid intake = 1.5-2litres/24hours, (equivalent of 3-4 pints/24hours)

Average number of times to pass urine = 5-7 times/24hours

Bladder retraining

The purpose of bladder training is to learn to suppress or ignore the desire to pass urine so that the normal pattern is achieved, without urgency or incontinence.

Bladder retraining takes time and only you can make it work.

Keep a record of how many times a day you pass urine, the type of drink consumed and volume and if you are wet. Keep this chart for at least 3 days; your physiotherapist will show you how to complete the bladder diary.

See how often you go to the toilet and if you can gradually increase the time between visits to the toilet. This will also show you how much your bladder can hold.

When you get the urge to pass urine try and hold on. Just a minute or two to start with, then gradually increase to 5 minutes, then 10-15 minutes and then from half an hour to an hour. You should gradually increase the time between your visits until you are only going 5-7 times a day, and no more than once a night.

The aim of the retraining program is to increase the bladder capacity for holding on to urine and for you to gain confidence that your bladder can behave. It may take weeks or even months to gain control. You will have good and bad days but with determination you can succeed.

Tips for holding on

- Keep calm and relaxed – don't panic
- Stand still or sit. It can be useful to focus on your breathing.
- Cross your legs
- Sit on a hard seat, rolled towel or over the arm of a chair
- Press on your pelvic floor muscles/perineal area or back of legs
- While standing or sitting, go up and down on your tip toes
- Scrunch your toes up in sitting or standing
- Distract yourself, e.g. make a phone call, wash dishes, tidy the house, etc.
- Stand or sit still for 10-20seconds before calmly walking to the toilet
- Count to 60 before going to the toilet
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles for up to 10-20seconds. Repeat 2-3 times. This will help relax the bladder and the urge may disappear.

Bladder retraining requires considerable willpower and determination. The less often you pass urine, the less often you will need to go, until eventually you will feel in control of your bladder. It may take several months so don't give up.

Food and drink that may irritate the bladder and increase your urgency to urinate

- Coffee/tea (caffeine). This includes green tea which is high in caffeine.
- Carbonated (fizzy) e.g. coke, alcohol, nicotine, low sugar/diet drinks.
- Citrus juices (e.g. orange, lemon, grapefruit) & some spicy foods.

Drinks that do not irritate the bladder

- Water or squash in water, fruit, herbal teas, decaffeinated coffee/tea.
- Non-citrus fruit juices (e.g. apple, cranberry)

Healthy habits

- Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid per day (1.5-2litres), water is best.
- Try to reduce alcohol, fizzy drinks & caffeinated drinks. Drink decaffeinated drinks instead. (See list above)

- Try to avoid going to pass urine 'just in case' as this encourages your bladder to misbehave– only go if you really need to.
- Always sit to pass urine; squatting over the toilet doesn't let your bladder empty fully which can make your symptoms worse. You could keep some antibacterial wipes in your bag to clean the toilet before you sit or you can use a toilet seat cover if you are out in public.
- Spread your drinks out evenly throughout the day and don't drink large amounts all at once – better to drink little and often.
- Do not restrict your fluid intake as this will make your symptoms worse, i.e. cause more urgency and can lead to constipation.
- Being your correct body weight will reduce the strain placed on the pelvic floor muscles.

Diet

- Avoid constipation (straining to empty bowels) as this puts extra strain on the pelvic floor muscles. See optimal toilet position for opening bowels below.
- Eating a balanced diet with 3 meals a day which includes plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables at least 5 portions a day.



Knees higher than hips
Lean forward and put elbows on knees
Bulge abdomen
Straighten spine

Contact Information for Barts Health Therapies Department

The Royal London Hospital

Telephone No: 0207 377 7872

Email: BHNT.BartsHealthTherapies@nhs.net

Mile End Hospital

Telephone No: 0207 377 7872

Email: BHNT.BartsHealthTherapies@nhs.net

Whipps Cross University Hospital

Telephone: 0208 539 5522, Ext: 5485 (Wanstead site: 0208 989 2368, Chingford site: 0208 524 3071)

Email: wxphysio.outpatients@bartshealth.nhs.uk

Newham University Hospital

Telephone No: 0207 363 8141

Email: TherapyOutpatients.Newham@bartshealth.nhs.uk

For patient information leaflets on other conditions please visit:

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services.

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.

For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 8223 8934.

Te informacje mogą zostać na żądanie przedstawione w formatach alternatywnych, takich jak łatwy do czytania lub duża czcionka, i w różnych językach. Prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 02082238934.

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