

# Over active bladder



## Information for patients

Continence Service



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SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST





## What is an over active bladder (OAB)?

An over active bladder (OAB) is a common condition affecting both men and women. OAB is a term used to group together some of the common problems that people may experience with their bladder. The main symptom being a sudden desire to go and empty your bladder when it may not be full or ready to empty.

## How does a normal bladder work?

A normal bladder is relaxed when it is filling up with urine. When it is becoming full the bladder sends a signal to the brain to say it's time to empty your bladder. When it is convenient, you would then decide to go to the toilet. The bladder muscle begins to contract and the bladder empties all its urine.

## What symptoms am I likely to notice with OAB?

**Frequency:** This is when you go to the toilet many times, 8 or more times in 24 hours. You may find that the urine you pass is small in volume.

**Urgency:** This is when you suddenly need to go to the toilet. You may be unable to put it off and you have to go straight away.

**Urgency incontinence:** This is when you get a sudden urge to go to the toilet and you don't make it in time before your bladder starts to leak urine.

**Nocturia:** This is when you need to pass urine more than once during the night.

## What causes OAB?

In most cases the cause is unknown.

However, we are aware that certain things can make your bladder symptoms worse, such as:

- Anxiety
- Urine Infection
- Side effects of some medication
- Constipation
- Certain drinks
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Medical conditions that affect the nervous system, such as a Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson's disease
- Smoking
- Some foods

## What can I do to help?

Some changes may help, such as lifestyle changes and bladder re-training. You are advised to:

- Avoid constipation; try to include fruit, vegetables and fibre in your diet, a full bowel can worsen your bladder problem.
- Try to reduce drinks that contain caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea, hot chocolate, green tea and cola, as well as energy drinks.
- Avoid blackcurrant cordials.
- Try not to drink too much or too little (approximately 7 mugs / glasses a day is just about right or 1½ litres / 2½ pints).
- Avoid artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, saccharin and acesulfame K.

- Only go to the toilet when you need to go, try not to 'go just in case'.
- Avoid restricting your drinks as this will concentrate your urine which can make the bladder more irritable.
- Pelvic floor exercises can strengthen the pelvic floor muscles to help prevent urine from leaking out.

## **Is there anything I can do when I feel the urge to empty my bladder?**

Trying to 'hold on' can be difficult, you could try:

- Sitting on a hard chair or the edge of your seat, a rolled up towel will give extra firmness.
- Relaxation and distraction techniques, for example counting backwards from 20 to 0, or reading / watching TV.
- Pull in your pelvic floor then relax and repeat (your nurse or physiotherapist will discuss this with you in more detail).
- Standing on tip toes can also lessen the urge to empty your bladder.

## **What is bladder re-training?**

The aim of bladder re-training is to cut down the number of times you have to go to the toilet. The nurse or physiotherapist will explain how to complete a bladder diary. Once completed, the chart will give you a good idea how frequently you pass urine, the amount you pass and the longest time between your visits to the toilet.

Your aim is to lengthen the time between visiting the toilet. For example, if you go every hour, your aim is to slowly increase this to perhaps an hour and five minutes. Try to start off small and increase by minutes rather than half hour increases (passing urine at set times rather

than the first urge). When you get the urge to pass urine use the 'holding on' tips discussed previously. It may take 10-15 seconds for the urgency to subside.

Remember to persevere; it may take you a while before you see results (up to 12 weeks).

## **What should I expect from my clinic treatment?**

- You will be taught how to do pelvic floor muscle exercises.
- You will be taught bladder re-training and methods to suppress the urgency to empty your bladder.
- We may ask you to complete regular bladder diaries which will help us both to monitor your progress.
- Sometimes the above approaches are not quite enough and medication to help relax the bladder may be of help. The nurse or physiotherapist will discuss this with you if they feel it will help you.
- We aim to help you to self-manage your symptoms.

## **Where can I find further information?**

The following organisations have lots of useful information and advice:

The Bladder and Bowel Foundation

- **[www.bladderandbowel.org](http://www.bladderandbowel.org)**

The Cystitis and Overactive Bladder Foundation

- **[www.cobfoundation.org/](http://www.cobfoundation.org/)**





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