

Bladder Training Information Sheet

Bladder training (or bladder drill) is a self-help program aimed to reduce the symptoms of:

- urinary frequency - passing urine more often than four to six times a day
- nocturia - passing urine more than once a night in the under 65's and once to twice a night as you get older
- urgency - not being able to, or not wanting to hold on because of discomfort or fear of leaking
- urge incontinence.

Bladder training will re-educate your bladder to feel more comfortable when it is filling, and enable you to go for longer before you need to empty (void) again.

Over a six to eight week period the aim is to gradually lengthen the time you can hold on before passing urine. Most women with this problem can hold on for only seconds or minutes when they have the urge to pass urine. During that time, they are constantly aware of the urgent messages coming from their bladder, and worry that they will leak urine if they try to hold on. Make a note of how long you can hold on when you need to pass urine.

The drill

In the first few days, trial each of the bladder defer tactics suggested by the physiotherapist. You use these simply to calm the urgent feeling from the bladder.

Each time you need to pass urine:

1. Choose one of the tactics
2. Use it to calm your bladder down
3. When the bladder is calm, go to the toilet.

You are not aiming to hold on for a long time, but to be able to simply reach the toilet with you, not your bladder, in control.

This is **bladder calming**. It may take up to two weeks for you to feel totally confident with the defer tactics you have chosen. Obviously, some of the tactics may be more effective for you than others so don't waste your time on those which do not work as well. It is important not to rush this stage.

Bladder training

When you are confident with the calming techniques, you can begin to use these tactics in **bladder training**.

When you feel the urge to pass urine and you know that it is inappropriate, use the defer tactics to stop the bladder sensation, and hold on for one minute. If the feeling comes back during that time, use the defer tactic again until you have reached one minute.

At this stage, you can head for the toilet. Do not run, walk. Running will only worsen the feeling from the bladder. If the feeling comes back while you are on the way to the toilet, stand still and use the defer tactics again. Once again, when the bladder has calmed down, head for the toilet. The aim is that 'you are in control of your bladder', not the other way around.

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Once you are comfortable doing this (it may take you a few days) then increase your hold time to two minutes, then three, four and five. Each time use your defer tactics to get to the toilet with you in control. Gradually build up to holding on for approximately half an hour. Quite often during this time, you may find that you defer the urge and then forget about needing to go for 15 to 30 minutes as your bladder is not sending you frantic signals. Obviously, if you don't have the urge to pass urine, don't.

Try and teach yourself to avoid the 'just-in case' visits. Aim to go to the toilet four to six times during the day and once at night if you have a normal fluid intake of six to eight glasses of fluid per day.

Bladder calming and training takes a great deal of effort and willpower and is best started when you can pay attention to it, and feel secure. For most women, this is a day when they are at home. This training won't work unless you keep doing the drill when you are out or at work.

It is vitally important that you do it step by step, no faster than suggested. This will enable your bladder to build up its tolerance gradually to a longer time before emptying and with a larger amount of urine. Short cuts do not allow for this gradual increase in tolerance and they will not work.

Help yourself in other ways:

- Limit the amount of caffeine (coffee, tea, Coca-Cola and chocolate) and alcohol you drink.
- Try and avoid artificial sweeteners as these can make your bladder symptoms worse.
- Try and keep your weight within a healthy range for your height.
- If you have previously controlled your bladder problem by limiting your fluid intake, feel comfortable with your defer tactics before trying to increase your fluids to normal levels.

The bladder training program is not suitable for you if:

- you have an excessive fluid intake, until it is reduced to normal limits
- your bladder is giving you urgent messages because it is already being asked to hold for too long a period, so has too large a capacity.

If you are in doubt, check with your physiotherapist at King Edward Memorial Hospital Physiotherapy Department (08)9340 2790.

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