

# Bladder re-training: treatment for urgency and urgency incontinence

## What is urge incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is where you are unable to control your bladder when you pass urine. There are a number of different types of urinary incontinence, but the two most common types are:

- **Urgency incontinence:** Where you have a sudden need to pass urine (urgency), have to rush to the toilet and may leak some urine before you reach a toilet. This type of bladder problem is often referred to as an overactive bladder.
- **Stress incontinence:** Where you leak urine without having the urge to go. This may happen when you cough or sneeze, laugh or exercise. The initial treatment for this type of incontinence is **pelvic floor exercises**. They are explained in another leaflet, please ask your nurse or doctor if you would like a copy.

This leaflet explains what **urgency incontinence** is and things that you can do to help to improve your symptoms.

## What causes urgency incontinence?

Sometimes your bladder sends messages to your brain too early, before it's full. Your bladder overrides the 'hold on' message from your brain, causing your bladder to contract and sometimes release urine (cause you to leak) before you want it to. Because it does not fill up completely, you may need to go to the toilet more often (this can be referred to as frequency). People can also get into the habit of going to the toilet when they don't really need to, 'just in case' or before the bladder gets full. This makes you need to pass urine more frequently as your bladder gets used to holding less urine and it can become more sensitive and overactive.

An overactive bladder is more common as you grow older due to changes in your bladder and pelvic floor muscles, as well as other medical conditions such as diabetes. It is also affected by the menopause in women. It can occur in both men and women of all ages. However, it is not considered a normal part of the ageing process.

## What is bladder training and how can it help?

Many people with urgency (the need to rush quickly to the toilet) will get into the habit of going to the toilet too often, trying to make sure that they are not caught short. This can make the problem of urgency even worse, because the bladder gets used to holding less and less urine, causing its capacity to reduce. It then becomes even more sensitive or overactive.

Bladder retraining can help to improve, or even cure the problem of an overactive bladder. This is a method that helps the bladder hold onto more urine and become less overactive. Bladder training isn't easy, it takes time and determination.

The goal with bladder retraining is to cut the amount of times you pass urine down to six to eight times in 24 hours, or passing 350 - 400mls of urine each time. This is done by gradually increasing the length of time between your trips to the toilet. You may find this is difficult to start with, and you may find that you leak a little more initially, but this will become easier as your bladder adjusts to holding more urine.

### Tips to help:

You may find the following tips helpful when retraining your bladder:

- Do not rush to the toilet when you get the urge to go. Sit on a firm chair until the urge goes away. This can take 10 - 20 seconds. Try and hold on as long as possible and then go to the toilet.
- Try to drop the 'just in case' trips to the toilet. Don't go unless you really do need to go.
- Try to distract your attention from your bladder by thinking of or doing something else
- Other forms of distraction / delaying tactics include squeezing your pelvic floor muscle hard, crossing your legs, applying pressure to the pelvic floor by sitting on something hard, or standing on your toes.
- It is important that you drink enough fluid. If you are dehydrated, the urine will be stronger which will irritate the bladder more and will increase your frequency and urgency. Try to drink 1.5 - 2litres of fluid a day (3 pints, 6 - 8 cups). A reduced oral intake may also increase the chance of you developing a urine infection.
- Reduce the amount of caffeine you drink. Avoid fizzy and citrus drinks as these can irritate the bladder too.
- If you get up a lot in the night, don't drink after 8.30pm and stop taking a drink to bed with you. Whatever you drink later in the evening and during the night will be passed at

- Do your pelvic floor exercises regularly. These will help to strengthen your pelvic floor which will help improve the control of your bladder.

