

Nocturia

This leaflet explains what nocturia is and why it can occur. It also gives advice on how to prevent or reduce this problem. If you have any questions please contact your doctor, specialist nurse or pelvic health physiotherapist.

What is nocturia?

Nocturia is where you frequently wake up in the night and need to pass urine. It often increases with age. It is common with elderly people who may be getting up twice a night, but more frequent visits to the toilet may indicate a problem that can be treated.

If you start needing to make several trips to the toilet at night you may find this distressing or your sleep may be disturbed.

What causes nocturia?

- **Hormonal changes:** You produce less anti-diuretic hormone as you age. This is a chemical that your body makes to help hold on to fluid at night, so you make less urine. Lower levels of this hormone mean that more urine is produced at night.
- **Prostate problems:** Men's prostate glands often start growing with age. This gland surrounds the urethra (the tube that urine passes through before exiting the body). An enlarged prostate can press on your urethra and prevent your bladder from emptying properly, so you need to pass urine more often.
- **Bladder problems**
 - **Urgency incontinence (also known as an overactive bladder).** This is where you have a sudden need to pass urine and may leak before you are able to reach a toilet.
 - **Bladder infections.** These are usually caused by bacteria entering your bladder. Symptoms include dark, cloudy and smelly urine; a burning feeling or pain when passing urine; and not being able to empty your bladder completely.
- **Medical conditions**
 - **Heart problems:** If you have a heart condition, your heart and circulation become less efficient and you will notice swelling around your ankles. When you are lying down or your feet are raised up, fluid is absorbed into your blood stream and removed by your kidneys. This increases the need to urinate at night.

- **Diabetes:** High blood sugar increases your thirst, so you may drink more than usual and this leads to a frequent need to go to the toilet. High blood sugar levels also irritate the bladder causing you to pass urine more frequently
- **Sleep related problems:** You are more likely to feel the urge to go to the toilet while you are awake. Therefore, if you keep waking up in the night or have problems sleeping, you are more likely to need to pass urine.
- **Drinking fluids:** Drinking a lot of fluid, especially close to bed time, will increase your need to go to the toilet during the night.

Is there anything I can do?

- Reduce the amount you drink before you go to bed. For example, have your last drink at 8.00pm instead of 10.00pm. However, make sure you are still drinking the recommended daily amount: this is six to eight cups of fluid a day (about three to four pints or 1.5 - 2 litres). Reducing the amount you drink does not help, unless you currently drink large amounts.
- Have fewer drinks that contain caffeine, such as tea, coffee, hot chocolate, green tea and cola. These can irritate your bladder and change your sleep patterns, as can alcohol.
- If you regularly have swollen ankles, make sure you sit or lie down for about an hour during the day. Raise your legs and feet so they are at, or above, the level of your heart. It may also help to wear support stockings.
- Some medicines make your body produce more urine, or promote its flow. In many cases this is how the medicine works to treat the condition, (for example, water tablets for high blood pressure). If you are unsure if your medicines could be causing nocturia, ask your doctor. Please do not stop taking your regular medicines without the advice of your doctor.
- Consider whether anything is disturbing your sleep. If your room is too light or too cold, this may wake you up. If you have painful conditions that disturb your sleep consult with your GP. Reduce any naps you take during the day to see if this helps you to sleep better at night. Also, avoid stimulants like drinks containing caffeine before you go to bed.

Specialist treatment for nocturia

If nocturia persists you may have a bladder / prostate problem that requires treatment.

- Prostate problems: These may be treated in different ways and your doctor / nurse specialist will discuss the options with you. They may include treatment with medicines and possibly trans-urethral resection of prostate (TURP) surgery. (Please see our leaflet on TURP for further information).
- Urge incontinence: This is commonly treated using a group of medicines called antimuscarinics, such as solifenacin. These medicines relax your bladder so that it can hold more urine.
- Anti-diuretic hormone (ADH): ADH helps to regulate water balance in the body. A lower level of this hormone increases excessive thirst and the need to go to the toilet. In a few cases of nocturia, taking desmopressin an hour before bedtime reduces production of urine overnight. Replacement of anti-diuretic hormone using the medicine desmopressin can help.

A low dose of diuretic in the early evening may help to unload excess fluid before bed time. When used during the day this will help the body produce more urine, so that any excess is passed before you go to bed.

Your doctor or nurse will explain the benefits and potential side-effect of these medications. They may take a routine blood test before prescribing medicine to help your nocturia.

