

## **BLADDER TRAINING**

(Also described as bladder retraining or bladder drill)

Bladder training is a form of self-help for people with overactive bladder symptoms such as urinary urgency, increased urinary frequency, with or without urinary incontinence. Some patients can successfully reduce these symptoms by following the guidance below, however reassessment, support and instruction from the specialist Bladder and Bowel Service is recommended for those with severe symptoms or for those who do not improve within an acceptable length of time.

You will find charts such as a bladder diary on this website, and information about pelvic floor muscle exercises.

### **1. Keep a chart called a Bladder Diary**

A bladder diary records the times of passing urine and voided volumes; episodes of incontinence; pad usage and other information such as the degree of urgency; the degree of incontinence; and fluid intake and type.

Chart your trips to the toilet and the volume of urine passed for a minimum of three days, covering work and leisure days. You will need to buy an inexpensive plastic jug if you don't have one. When at home, pass urine into the measuring jug each time you visit the toilet. Write down on a piece of paper or on a chart if you have been given one, the times day and night, and the volume of urine in the jug. After each use, empty the jug into the toilet bowl, rinse with cold water and dry.

Keep the jug for this purpose only. Once you have completed your first chart store the jug in a safe place as you may be asked to repeat this procedure to compare and assess your improvement. If you are going out or if you work, the clinic will not expect you to take your jug, but please keep a note of each time you pass urine. When you arrive home, put the time and a tick on the chart each time you passed urine while away from home. It may also be unrealistic to measure any urine passed when opening your bowels therefore, a tick should be placed on the chart at this time too.

Also record on your chart the volumes and type of fluids you drink on these days.

### **2. Review what you drink**

Many people seem to rely entirely on tea and coffee for their fluid intake. Experience has shown that this does not help with bladder training, as the caffeine in these drinks (and many others) makes the body produce urine quickly and makes the bladder muscle squeeze more powerfully than usual, causing urgency (the sudden need to reach the toilet quickly). Carbonated drinks, some fruit juices and alcohol may also irritate the bladder in some individuals.

Try varying your fluid intake to include water. Some people find drinking water is not easy or palatable or have just got out of the habit of drinking plain water. Water is very good for you and by regularly sipping some plain water as you work or relax, you will soon find you can drink and enjoy plain water again.

Be careful about the sugar content of some drinks if you want to keep your sugar intake under control. If you are of average height and weight, and unless advised otherwise by your doctor, try

to drink about 8 mugs or glasses of fluid a day, gradually through-out the day and evening, having a drink every 1 to 2 hours. It may be necessary to drink more in hot weather. Your urine should be pale straw colour most of the time and you are aiming to pass good volumes when you need to go.

### **3. Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises (PFME's)**

The nurse or physiotherapist will teach you to carry out a programme of PFME's. This will strengthen the supporting muscles and encourage the bladder itself to relax. Also, by tightening the pelvic floor muscles when you feel the sudden need to pass urine, you can help this urgent feeling go away, helping the bladder to stretch and hold on for longer.

### **4. Bladder Training**

You are going to increase the time between visits to the toilet by 'holding on' to your urine for longer. When you feel the sudden desire to pass urine, sit down on a hard chair, tighten the pelvic floor muscles and breathe deeply. Concentrate on sending messages to the bladder to try to help the urgent sensation to go away. Once this feeling has passed, carry on with what you were doing. Try to extend the time between visits to the toilet by just a few minutes to begin with. You are aiming eventually to pass urine every 2 to 3 hours during the day.

It may take several weeks to train the bladder so do not give up. The biggest effort must come from you carrying out the bladder training technique as described here and the pelvic floor muscle exercises. The extent of the improvement depends on your commitment but some patients may need further help and encouragement from the specialist Bladder and Bowel Service, so speak to your doctor or nurse about being referred, if you are concerned in any way.

Once back to a normal pattern of passing urine, remember to continue with a good fluid intake and the pelvic floor muscle exercises.