

Bladder retraining

Information for patients

This leaflet answers some of the questions you may have about bladder retraining.

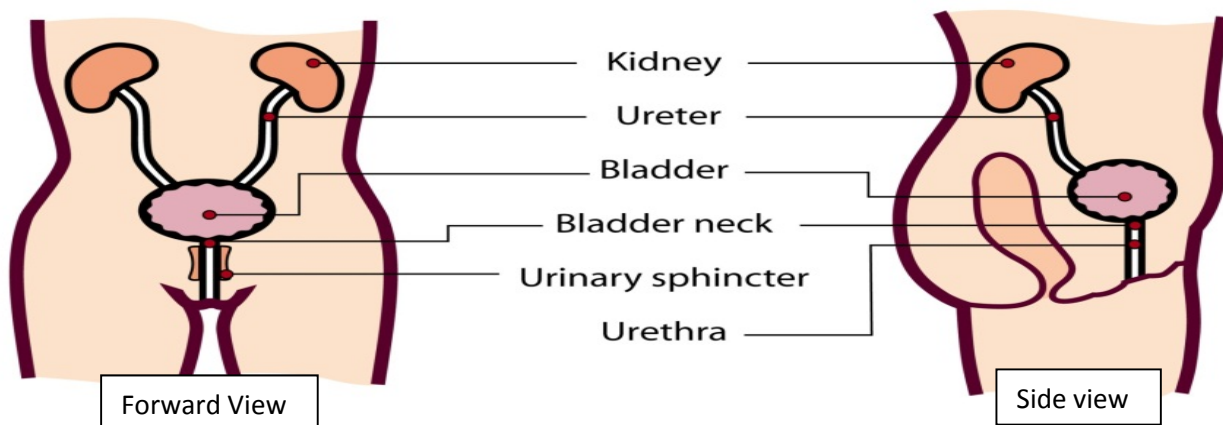
Why do I need bladder retraining

You have been referred for bladder retraining because you have bladder problems that are affecting your daily life. You are not alone: it is estimated that one in three women in the UK have a bladder problem. By making certain changes to your lifestyle, doing pelvic floor exercises and following a bladder retraining programme you to regain control of your bladder.

How does my bladder normally work?

Urine is made in the kidneys, and travels down two tubes called the ureters to the bladder. The bladder is a storage organ that is shaped like a floppy balloon and as it fills it expands to store the urine. The urethra is a tube that runs from the neck of the bladder to the outside of your body, just in front of the vagina. The urethra has a valve called the urinary sphincter which tightens to prevent urine from leaking out.

A healthy bladder can hold around 400ml-600ml. It is normal to pass urine up to 8 times a day and up to once during the night. If you are older (> 70 years old) passing urine 1-2 times at night is normal.



As the bladder starts to fill it sends a warning message to the brain. You normally feel the first warning that you need to go when your bladder has about 200ml. If you decide that it is not a convenient time to go to the toilet and you want to hold on, your brain sends messages to your bladder to relax allowing you to continue with whatever you are doing at the time. The desire to empty your bladder will gradually become stronger and more difficult to put off or control. When you find an appropriate opportunity to empty your bladder, you sit on a toilet, relax your pelvic floor

muscles and urinary sphincter and your bladder muscle will start to contract and expel the urine. Your bladder keeps contracting until it is completely empty, after which it will relax again and the whole process of filling and storage starts again.

What is an overactive bladder (OAB)?

When you have an overactive bladder you may experience some of these symptoms:

- A sudden desperate desire to go to the toilet (urgency)
- Leaking before you reach the toilet or failing to get your clothes off in time (urgency incontinence)
- Getting up more than once at night to pass urine (nocturia)
- Passing urine more frequently during the day (frequency)
- Leaking urine when you are asleep (nocturnal enuresis).

If you have any of these symptoms you may have an overactive bladder. We will perform bladder function studies to assess if you have detrusor over activity (abnormal muscle activity of your bladder which is a cause of OAB symptoms).

What are the causes of overactive bladder (OAB)?

We don't know what causes an overactive bladder but we do know that there are a number of risk factors such as:

- Neurological conditions such as a stroke, multiple sclerosis or back surgery
- Menopause
- Age
- Anxiety
- Diabetes
- Abdominal surgery
- Lifestyle

Other causes that can affect your bladder include:

- Urinary tract infections.
- Bladder stones and bladder tumours.
- Uterine fibroids.

However, the exact cause of OAB in many patients remains unknown.

What are the treatment options (OAB)?

Bladder retraining

The aim of bladder retraining is for you to be able to hold on for longer, have less urinary leakage and, to have more control of your bladder. You can train your bladder to hold more urine for longer periods of time by gradually increasing the time between going to toilet. The aim is to slowly stretch your bladder so it can hold larger volumes of urine. In time, the bladder muscle will stretch and you will gain more control of your bladder.

When trying to hold on, try distracting yourself by:

- Sitting straight on a hard seat
- Counting backwards from 100
- Doing some pelvic floor exercise
- Deep breathing techniques
- Curling your toes

Try to:

- Stay calm and wait for the urge to pass
- Time yourself and try to hold on for longer
- Complete a bladder diary to help you monitor your progress
- Start with a couple of minutes and gradually increase the time
- Avoid 'just-in-case' visits to the toilet.



Bladder retraining can be difficult, but becomes easier with time and perseverance. With time you should find it becomes easier as your bladder gets used to holding larger amounts of urine.

What can lifestyle changes help?

Aim to drink 1.5 litres (2.5 pints) of fluids per day; you may need up to 2L if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, overweight, exercising or it is hot. Drinking an excessive amount will make your symptoms of frequency and urgency worse, while not drinking enough will lead to strong, concentrated urine which irritates your bladder and you will find yourself rushing to the toilet.



Caffeinated drinks



fizzy drinks



citrus drinks



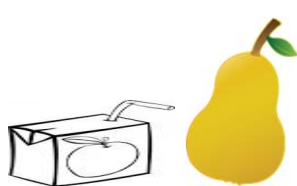
Green tea

- Try to spread your drinking throughout the day
- Avoid drinking late at night – stop drinking two hours before you go to bed.
- Avoid fluids that may irritate your bladder such as:
 - Caffeinated drinks including tea, coffee, green tea, hot chocolate
 - Nettle tea
 - Alcohol, especially white wine
 - Fizzy drinks
 - Drinks which contain artificial sweeteners
 - Citrus fruits such as lemon, lime, grapefruit and oranges
 - Tomato juice, blackcurrant juice
- Lose weight, if you are overweight (BMI >25)
- Stop smoking because the nicotine in cigarettes irritates your bladder (speak to your health care provider if you would like referral for NHS support).

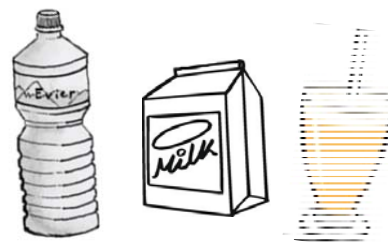
You may wish to drink **water, diluted fruit juice (Pear, Apple), milk, fruit tea or herbal teas such as mint or red bush tea**, which do not irritate your bladder.



Decaffeinated drinks



Apple and pear juice



Water, Milk and milkshakes



Can pelvic floor exercises help?

Doing regular pelvic floor exercises have been shown to improve bladder control and prevent leakage of urine and faeces. If you don't know how to do pelvic floor exercises we can arrange for you to be seen by our physiotherapist.

Are there any medications that can help me?

There is a range of medication that can help with the symptoms of an overactive bladder. They may improve symptoms especially in combination with bladder retraining and lifestyle changes. Do not stop taking your medicine if you do not see an immediate effect. It may take a few weeks for the medication to start to work and you may need to take it on a long term basis.

How do the drugs work?

Anticholinergics (Eg. oxybutynin, solifenacin, fesoterodine)

Medicines called anticholinergics relax your bladder muscle and reduce the contractions of your bladder. This reduces your need to go to the toilet and cuts down on the number of urine leaks. Anticholinergic medications may have side effects. 1 in 3 patients suffers from a dry mouth, which can be uncomfortable. Less common side effects include constipation, taste disturbances, blurred vision, dry eyes, drowsiness, dizziness and tiredness. If you do not like taking tablets, you can try a patch that you apply to your skin that allows the medication to enter the bloodstream through the skin. Alternatively, there is a liquid form of this medication.

Beta 3-adrenoceptor agonist (Mirabegron)

If you are taking an anticholinergic medication and are experiencing side effects an alternative medication that you can try is called Mirabegron. This is a bladder muscle relaxant which reduces the activity of an overactive bladder and treats the related symptoms. This drug has few side effects but should not be used if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure.

Constipation

Constipation can place added pressure on the bladder and have an adverse effect on bladder function. By keeping healthy bowel habits, you may be able to avoid constipation and help to reduce bladder symptoms. In general, your diet should be balanced and contain whole grains, fruit, and vegetables.

Relationships and overactive bladder

Having an overactive bladder can often affect women's sexual health, reducing sexual desire and the ability to achieve orgasm, and sometimes causing pain during intercourse. It is important to talk to your partner about your overactive bladder and how this affects your sexual health, as well as the possibility of urine leaks during sex. Visiting the toilet before sex may help prevent leakages. If you do sometimes leak urine during intercourse, you may want to try experimenting with different positions that put less pressure on your bladder.

Other options

If conservative treatments or medications do not work to resolve your symptoms there are alternative options that are available such as neuromodulation (Percutaneous tibial nerve stimulation), botulinum toxin to the bladder, topical vaginal oestrogen creams as well as other treatments. We will discuss these options with you on an individual basis.

Who do I contact with queries and concerns?

We hope that you have found this leaflet helpful. If you have any queries or concerns. Please call the Urogynaecology department on 0203 299 3457 between 9am-5pm Monday to Friday.

Bladder & Bowel Foundation

If you would like medical advice please phone our Helpline which is staffed by specialist continence nurses and physiotherapists on **0845 345 0165**. For all other enquiries please use the general enquiries telephone number.

General enquiries: 01536 533255

Email: info@bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence

ERIC is the only UK charity dedicated to improving the lives of children and young people with ongoing continence problems.

Helpline: 0845 370 8008

www.eric.org.uk/

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

Tel: 020 3299 3601 Email: kch-tr.PALS@nhs.net

You can also contact us by using our online form at www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.

www.kch.nhs.uk
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