



OVERACTIVE BLADDER AND URGENCY

You don't have to put up with it

What is overactive bladder?

The bladder is a muscle which contracts to empty the bladder when it is full and you are ready to empty.

An overactive bladder means the bladder contracts before it is full. It can sometimes contract when you are not ready.

You might go to the toilet often and find it hard to hold on until you get there. At times you may leak urine on the way to the toilet.

What causes overactive bladder?

Poor bladder control may be due to health problems, such as:

- ⇒ stroke
- ⇒ having an enlarged prostate gland
- ⇒ Parkinson's disease.

An overactive bladder can be due to poor bladder habits over a long time.

For some people the cause is unknown.

What are normal bladder habits?

It is normal to:

- ⇒ empty your bladder about four to six times through the day
- ⇒ empty your bladder before you go to bed at night
- ⇒ empty your bladder once overnight or twice if you are over 65 years of age
- ⇒ empty your bladder when you get out of bed in the morning.

A healthy bladder holds about 400–600mls of urine.

Your bladder holds this much during the day. It holds more during the night, before you feel the need to pass urine.

This pattern may change in older people. Older people may make more urine at night. This means they may have to pass more urine through the night than they do in the day.

What is a bladder training program?

The aim of bladder training is to improve symptoms of an overactive bladder.

Bladder training teaches you how to hold more urine in your bladder without feelings of urgency. Visit your doctor, a nurse continence specialist or pelvic health physiotherapist if you have problems with bladder control. They could start you on a bladder training program. If you do nothing about your problem, it may get worse.

What is in a bladder training program?

You may be asked to keep a bladder diary. You need to keep the diary for at least 3 days. It keeps track of how your bladder works through the day.

The bladder diary keeps track of:

- ⇒ the time you go to the toilet
- ⇒ how much urine you pass each time
- ⇒ how strong you felt the urge to empty each time.

The bladder diary may look like this:

Time	Amount of urine passed	How strong was the urge to go?
6.30am	250mls	4
8.00am	150mls	3
9.00am	100mls	3
10.20am	150mls	1
12.15pm	100mls	1
1.25pm	200mls	3
2.30pm	200mls	3

How do I measure the amount of urine passed?

Put a container (like an ice cream container) in the toilet. Now sit on the toilet and relax with your feet on the floor. Pass urine into the container. Then tip the urine into a jug to measure it. Men may want to stand and pass urine directly into a measuring jug.



How do I measure urgency?

This chart shows how to use a number to describe the urge you felt.

0	No urgency	I felt no need to empty. I emptied for other reasons.
1	Mild urgency	I could put it off as long as needed. I had no fear of wetting myself.
2	Moderate urgency	I could put it off for a short time. I had no fear of wetting myself.
3	Severe urgency	I could not put it off. I had to rush to the toilet. I had fear I would wet myself.
4	Urge incontinence	I leaked before I got to the toilet.

How do I measure leaking using a Pad Weight Test?

This test helps to work out how much urine you leak over a few days. To do this test you will need some accurate scales for weighing. You do this test by:

1. Weighing a dry pad in a plastic bag before you wear the pad.
2. Then weighing the wet pad in a plastic bag after you wear it.
3. Taking the weight of the dry pad away from the weight of the wet pad.

This will show how much you have leaked because each gram (g) equals one millilitre (ml).

Wet pad	400g
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Dry pad	150g
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Weight difference	250g
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Amount leaked = 250mls

Who can help with your bladder training program?

A doctor, nurse continence specialist or pelvic health physiotherapist can get the best results for you. They will work out a program to suit you.

The **National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66** can help you find your local continence clinic.

How long will it take?

Most bladder training programs take about three months. You may have regular meetings with your nurse continence specialist or pelvic health physiotherapist. They will teach you ways to hold on for longer. This will mean you can hold more urine in your bladder.

Helpful things you will learn during bladder training

Pelvic floor muscle exercises

The pelvic health physiotherapist or nurse continence specialist will teach you how to use your pelvic floor muscles. These muscles support your bladder and urethra. The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside. Strong pelvic floor muscles help to hold back the strong urge to pass urine. This will help you hold on until you reach the toilet.

Good bladder habits

Have fluids every day. Fluid includes milk, juice, yoghurt and soup. The best fluid to drink is water.

You need to keep track of how much fluids you have each day. You can measure your drinks by how much your cup or mug holds. Cups can hold from 120 to 180mls whereas mugs can hold 280 to 300mls or more.

Avoid drinking fizzy drinks or drinks with caffeine. These can upset the bladder and make it harder for you to hold on. There is some caffeine in chocolate, tea and coffee. There is more caffeine in cola and sports drinks. It is best to avoid drinking these.

You will learn which drinks to choose so your bladder will not be upset.

Good bowel habits

You will also learn how constipation and straining to pass a bowel motion can stretch your pelvic floor muscles. Avoid constipation as this also causes poor bladder control. Eat at least two pieces of fruit and five serves of vegetables daily.

Will there be setbacks?

Do not be worried by small day to day changes in your bladder control. These are normal.

Anyone on a bladder training program can have setbacks, when your symptoms may seem worse. This may happen when:

- ⇒ you have a bladder infection (see your doctor right away)
- ⇒ you are tired or run down
- ⇒ you are worried or stressed
- ⇒ the weather is wet, windy or cold
- ⇒ you are ill (such as a cold or the flu)
- ⇒ you are a menstruating woman.

If setbacks do happen, stay positive and keep trying.

Call the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66 (free call)

Speak with a nurse continence specialist for free and confidential advice on resources, details for local continence services, products and financial assistance.

For more information, you can also visit:

continence.org.au
toiletmap.gov.au
health.gov.au/bladder-bowel

This fact sheet is intended as a general overview only and is not a substitute for professional assessment and care.

This fact sheet is available in other languages from continence.org.au

