

Bladder Retraining

Bladder retraining could be recommended if you have symptoms of urinary urgency which are suggestive of an unstable/hyperactive bladder. While certain tablets may help this condition the most effective long-term treatment is bladder retraining.

The feelings of urgency happen because the bladder muscle contracts and tries to empty when the bladder is only partially full, at an inappropriate time, or as a result of outside influences (e.g. the sound of running water). Bladder retraining is designed to stretch the bladder muscle so that the bladder learns to hold more. You control when to go the toilet, not your bladder, and you gradually increase the times between going to the toilet. It usually takes some time, often several months, of enthusiastic bladder retraining before there is a significant improvement. Unless the bladder retraining is undertaken enthusiastically, bladder function will deteriorate and the incontinence may become worse. It must, however, be appreciated that if bladder retraining is undertaken enthusiastically there will be times when there is some discomfort and often a temporary increase in the number of episodes of leaking. Nevertheless, if this is endured, normal bladder function will gradually return. Caffeine and nicotine are very strong bladder stimulants and should be avoided when doing bladder training.

1. Ensure that there is a normal intake of oral fluid, this is between 1.5 and 2 litres of **caffeine free** fluid drunk during waking hours, but stopping 3 hours before bed. Water is probably the best and an intake of about 150mls (5 Oz) every hour should be the aim.
2. Establish a base-line toileting frequency with this adequate fluid intake. Some people find that they have to empty the bladder every hour or so, some more frequently, some less frequently. Once you know how often you go use this as your starting time. This should be rigidly adhered to until you can last this time without getting urgency symptoms.
3. Once you can last this time without urgency, increase the time by 15 minutes. For example, if you found that you were going to the toilet once an hour, increase the time interval to one hour and 15 minutes. Keep at this time again until you can manage it always without having urgency. It is very important that you go at the set time even if you feel that you don't need the toilet as you are trying to teach your bladder that you are the boss, not it!
4. Once you are managing the set time without urgency then again the time interval should be increased by a further 15 minutes.

This process is repeated until you reach 3.5 – 4 hours between going to the toilet.

5. If you find that the discomfort is unbearable and that you are incontinent most of the time, try shorter increases in the time interval, e.g. increase the time intervals only by 10 minutes, and/or maintain the present level of time interval that you can manage for longer before trying to increase again.
6. Remember that in order for bladder retraining to be effective the bladder muscle must be stretched more than usual, and this inevitably leads to some discomfort and some leakage.
7. Clearly, this programme cannot be continued throughout the night. Bladder drill should be done for 12 hours from when you get up. After this the fluid intake can be reduced in order to ensure a more comfortable night's sleep.
8. If you are struggling to increase the times then tablets can be used which reduce the urgency feelings. They are not cures for the problem on their own though, but they can be obtained from your family doctor (GP)