

Patient information from Gordon Muir, Consultant Urological Surgeon

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Bladder Retraining

Many patients have an overactive bladder which may be present before or after surgery for prostate problems, or may be linked to infections. Sometimes the bladder is just overactive for no reason that we know of. While quite often we can treat bladder overactivity with medical therapy which does have some side effects, and in many patients who are not troubled by problems such as incontinence, it may well be possible to use more natural methods until we get the bladder back into shape.

The primary problem in many patients is that the bladder has a lack of compliance (stretchiness) which may or may not be caused by it having become over muscled to deal with a blockage.

Bladder retraining seeks to improve the compliance and the capacity of the bladder with the over activity then hopefully reducing as a result. What's important to realise is that the feeling of urgency patients often have, is not due to the bladder being stretched to dangerous levels, but due to the nerve endings in the bladder recognising stretching at a level where a normal bladder would not pick this up. The feeling of urgency is usually related to a bit of spasm in the muscles of the bladder and this will usually pass if one can bear to ignore it.

For bladder retraining it is important to know that drinks and drugs can make things worse, so avoid it where possible. So caffeine, as found in some teas, coffee and fizzy drinks, and also alcohol should be avoided where possible, particularly at night. In order to try to increase the bladder capacity it is important that the exercises mentioned below are done regularly and also to realise that it may take between 6 to 12 weeks for our results to become apparent.

What you should do:

When you feel the need to pass urine, try to hang onto it for 15 to 20 minutes or more. This is not always as easy as it sounds and what may be helpful, is to make sure that you are in a situation where it doesn't matter if you do lose control. So for example, being in the lavatory but taking something to read or being in the garden or some other area where you will not be embarrassed if you have to suddenly give into the urge.

Essentially when you feel the need to pass urine, try to hold onto it for some time and if possible try to think of something else rather than the pressing need to void. What will usually happen is that the need to pass urine will build up to a crescendo and then go down again within a few minutes.

Many patients will find that after this urgency has gone they can actually go about their normal business for another half an hour or more. If you are unable to control the urge to void then it may help to let a little bit of urine out, stop the flow then try to hang on for a bit longer.

There will of course be some times when this is not practical or possible but the key thing here is persistence and what should happen over a period of around 12 weeks is that your ability to hold on will get better and better; this will usually mean that the capacity of the bladder is also getting better and better.

Good luck!