



# BLADDER TRAINING

The overall aim of bladder training is to restore the normal function of your bladder.

Research shows that bladder training is an effective treatment for some types of bladder problems.

When you do bladder training you are aiming to:

- decrease the number of times you go to the toilet
- increase the amount of urine you pass each time
- hold on for longer or put off emptying your bladder.

## How does a normal bladder work?

The normal bladder can hold approximately 600-800mls. It is usual to empty the bladder about four to six times per day. It is normal to make it to the toilet without rushing, or to be able to put off emptying the bladder if it is not convenient for you.

## Common problems you may experience

- Urgency – feeling the sudden need to rush to the toilet.
- Urge incontinence – feeling the urgent need to go to the toilet and not making it in time.
- Frequency – going to the toilet often, then only passing small amounts

Urgency and urge incontinence often occur because the bladder gets over excited and overactive.

## Some techniques which may help you control your urge

- Stop and relax – do not rush to the toilet.
- Breathe slowly and evenly.
- Perineal / Vaginal pressure:
  - Sit on the arm of a chair or the edge of a desk.
  - Sit on a rolled-up towel.
  - Cross your legs.
- Curl your toes repeatedly or hold firmly.
- Stretch your calf muscles and hold the stretch.
- If you are walking, slow your pace and emphasise heel-toe walking.
- Press or rub the trigger point on the inside of your leg just above your ankle.
- Press or rub the trigger point at the base of your nose.
- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles – hold them tight!
- Distract yourself! Do not think about the toilet or about leaking. Distract yourself with a physical or mental task e.g. count backwards from 100 by 3's or 7's; think of 3 Australian towns starting with A, then with B, then C etc.
- When you have performed the technique, walk to the toilet in a slow and controlled manner.

**Remember:** your bladder does not have eyes or ears; it cannot see the toilet nor know how far away you are. If you feel you may leak on the way it is just anxiety. Relax, stay calm and walk slowly.

**Remember:** different techniques work for different people. By practicing these techniques you will find out which ones work for you.

Use the above techniques to gradually increase the time between toileting and to stop getting out of bed at night when you feel the urge to go to the toilet.

## How do I retrain my bladder?

Review any lifestyle factors which may be contributing to poor bladder function, such as:

- reducing or ceasing caffeine intake (tea, coffee, cola drinks), alcohol and very sweet drinks
- not being constipated
- only going to the toilet when you need to go (not going “just-in-case”)
- drinking about 1.5L of fluid per day (mostly water) aim to regularly pass 300ml or more urine
- get rid of any cough or sneezing
- exercise your pelvic floor muscles as you have been shown
- maintain a healthy weight by walking for thirty minutes each day
- do persevere. You have the ability to make your brain the boss and retrain your bladder!
- do speak to your Physiotherapist or Continence Nurse about any concerns or problems you encounter.

It is important to have strong pelvic floor muscles. Please see facts sheets on *Pelvic Floor Exercises* and *Preventing Constipation* for more information.

## Setting a personal program

Every person will have different needs in regard to bladder training.

The first step is to complete a three-day bladder diary to get information about your bladder function. From this your personal goals can be set. Set yourself achievable goals. For example, if you start with a break of one hour between emptying your bladder, your initial goal may be to “hang on” for 5 or 10 minutes. The aim is to gradually increase the time you can “hang-on”. Discuss appropriate goals with your Continence Nurse or Physiotherapist.

## How will I know if it is working?

You may not notice an improvement immediately, but gradually you will become aware of not having to go to the toilet as often, being able to stop yourself going, passing more urine each time you go, having less urgency, and not getting up to the toilet at night time.

Bladder training takes time. You may have good and bad days. Persevere and you will eventually be the boss of your bladder.

## What happens if it doesn't work?

Despite best efforts, in a few cases, the bladder will not respond to the program. In these cases, some medications, prescribed by the doctor, may assist. If you decide to take medications it is important to still continue your bladder training strategies.

### For more information and advice

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