



**Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service  
Division of Gynaecology**

**PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET**

# BLADDER RETRAINING

A lot of people experience bladder problems and/or bladder leakage at some time in their lives. The three most common symptoms are frequency, urgency and urge incontinence.

Frequency means you are needing to go to the toilet very often – more than 7 times during the day. If you get up more than once at night this is called nocturia.

Urgency is the sudden and overwhelming feeling that you need to go to the toilet immediately and if you leak when you get this feeling it is called urge incontinence.

These symptoms combined are called overactive bladder symptoms.

## WHAT IS BLADDER RETRAINING?

Bladder retraining is the first line of treatment for overactive bladder symptoms and the aim is to teach you how to control your bladder instead of your bladder controlling you. This is done by eliminating bad habits and introducing good habits to help control your symptoms.

Bladder retraining programmes help you to gradually increase the time between visits to the toilet, help to increase the amount of urine your bladder holds and help you to control the feelings of urgency when the bladder contracts unnecessarily.

The training helps you to understand what triggers your symptoms and understand how to control and manage the symptoms when they occur. You will learn which messages from your bladder you need to listen to and which messages you can ignore.

Bladder retraining takes commitment and patience as it will take time to undo the habits that may have developed over many months or years and replace them with good habits.

Although many patients see some improvement within a couple of weeks, it can take longer for you to reach a stage that you are completely happy with.

Bladder retraining is a long-term solution that needs to be maintained. Many of the changes you make will need to be continued for life and that is why we refer to them as lifestyle changes.

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR BLADDER RETRAINING?

Before you attend the clinic for bladder retraining you will have been asked to complete a 3-day bladder diary, either in paper form or electronically depending on your preference (**Please see “Electronic bladder diary instructions” leaflet**).

It is very important that this is completed as accurately as possible before your appointment as it gives us a great deal of information about your current bladder function and will guide us in giving you the best possible advice to manage your symptoms.

**We will not be able to proceed with your initial appointment if you have not completed a bladder diary.** Please email your completed bladder diary to the email below ensuring that you include your name, date of birth and NHS number in the email: [Uro.Gynaecology@mft.nhs.uk](mailto:Uro.Gynaecology@mft.nhs.uk)

**If you are unable to complete a bladder diary for any reason, please inform the nurse so that we can arrange an alternative way of obtaining the information we need that suits your individual requirements.**

## TIPS TO HELP WITH BLADDER CONTROL

There are other things you can do alongside bladder retraining that can help you improve your bladder control. If you are overweight, have a chronic cough or suffer from constipation then seek advice from your doctor to help manage these issues as all of these can make your symptoms worse. There are also some medications that can affect your bladder so check with your doctor if you think this may be the case.

## GENERAL ADVICE

- Ensure you are drinking enough fluids throughout the day, ideally 1.5 – 2 litres. A lot of people reduce the amount of fluid they are drinking as they believe it will improve the leaking but in fact if your urine is too concentrated it will irritate your bladder and make it want to empty more often.
- Avoid drinks that can irritate your bladder such as caffeine (tea and coffee), fizzy drinks, energy drinks and alcohol. **In some cases, just this alone can improve symptoms significantly.** Your nurse will discuss this with you in more detail at your appointment.
- Avoid drinking within 2 hours of going to bed to reduce the risk of you needing to get up for the toilet during the night.
- Don't drink all your fluids at once. Space your fluid intake out during the day. If you drink a lot at once, you can expect the need to go to the toilet urgently not too long afterwards.

## REDUCE FREQUENCY

If you are going to the toilet more often than every 2-3 hours, then you need to increase the time between visits to the toilet. It is best to do this gradually to get the best results.

For example, if you are going to the toilet every hour then increase this to every hour and 15 minutes and use the techniques in the next section to overcome the feeling of urgency that you may experience.

Once you are comfortable with this (which may take up to a week) then increase the time by a further 15 minutes and so on. Your nurse will discuss this in more detail with you at your appointment after reviewing your bladder diary.

## HOW TO OVERCOME URGENCY AND URGE INCONTINENCE

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as hard as you can and hold on for as long as you can. Keep doing this until the feeling of urgency goes away or is under control. Contracting the pelvic floor muscles helps to squeeze the urethra (tube from the bladder) shut and prevent leakage.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles quickly and as hard as you can, then let go. Repeat this several times in a row. Some people find that several contractions in a row work better than trying to hold on to a contraction for a long time.
- Put firm pressure on the perineum (crotch area). You can do this by crossing your legs or sitting down on a firm surface. This also sends a message to the bladder via the nerves that the outlet from the bladder is closed so it should wait before it tries to empty.
- Distract your mind as best you can. For example, some people start to count backwards from 100, but any form of mental distraction or relaxation is good.
- Change your position if this decreases the feeling of urgency. Some people find that leaning forward a little helps.
- Stay still when you get an urgent bladder contraction and control the urge. You will struggle to hold on and stay in control if you rush to the toilet.
- Try not to jiggle up and down on the spot. Movement jolts the bladder and may make the problem worse.

All of these lifestyle changes and techniques will be discussed in more detail at your appointment and the bladder retraining will be personalised to you.

Remember, once you have successfully retrained your bladder you will need to maintain this for the rest of your life or your symptoms may return.

**If you require any further information or clarification of terminology, please do not hesitate to talk to one of the doctors or nurses, who will be happy to discuss your concerns with you.**

## CONTACT DETAILS

**If you experience any problems/difficulties, please ring:**



**Warrell Unit:**

(0161) 701 4455 (Choose option 3 “Urogynaecology”) – 08:30-16:00



<https://mft.nhs.uk/saint-marys/services/gynaecology/urogynaecology/>