

## PATIENT INFORMATION

### Bladder Retraining

#### **What Is It?**

Bladder retraining is a simple and effective method of treating many bladder symptoms. It is particularly helpful for urinary frequency (voiding more than 6 times a day), nocturia (getting up more than once a night), urgency (a sudden strong desire to void) and urge incontinence (urinary leakage before the toilet can be reached). These problems are very common and cause embarrassment and inconvenience. Bladder retraining is successful in many people and may avoid the need for medication or surgery.

#### **Why Does the Bladder Need Retraining?**

The bladder is a muscle that fills with urine, holds it and then contracts when you urinate. If the bladder muscle contracts when it is not supposed to, this causes urgency, urinary frequency and even incontinence. This condition is called "unstable bladder" (detrusor instability). In most women, the cause for the unstable bladder is not known. Urgency, frequency and incontinence may also be caused by an oversensitive bladder. Both of these problems respond to bladder retraining.

#### **What Is The Aim?**

The aim of bladder retraining is to increase the capacity of the bladder until it can hold the normal amount of urine (400-500 milliliters) enabling you to void less often (about every 3 to 4 hours). This requires learning to suppress bladder contractions using several techniques. The program takes 3 months to completely alter the bladder function, though some improvement may be noticed in a few weeks.

#### **The Training Program**

Bladder retraining involves increasing the amount of fluid the bladder can hold by gradually 'stretching' it. Instead of going to the toilet as soon as you get the desire to void, you should wait 5 minutes every time. At first this may be difficult, and you may only be able to achieve 2 to 3 minutes, but persist! Slowly increase the waiting period from 5 minutes to 10 minutes, and then from 10 to 20 to 30 minutes. During the time you are putting off going to the toilet, you are learning how to suppress bladder contractions. By filling the bladder with more urine, its wall is being stretched and so will hold more. It is also vital to stop going to the toilet 'just in case'. This encourages your bladder to hold only small volumes. You should only empty the bladder when it  
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is full and you have done your 'hold-on' exercise. (The only exception is when the bladder wakes you at night.)

## **Fluid Intake**

A good volume of fluid intake is required, such as 8-10 glasses of liquid a day. More than this is excessive. Avoid drinking anything within 2 hours of going to bed. Many people find that caffeinated drinks (many soft drinks, tea & coffee) make their bladder problem worse, and a trial of not drinking caffeine-containing beverages is worthwhile.

## **Bladder Control Techniques**

One or more of these techniques may be helpful in controlling the bladder when the urge is there, and allow voiding to be delayed. They all require practice and can also be used together.

**1) PELVIC FLOOR CONTRACTION** - (See “Exercising Your Pelvic Muscles”) This helps prevent urine leakage when there is an urgent desire to void. This method works best if applied as soon as you feel the unstable contraction.

**2) PERINEAL PRESSURE** - Pressure on the perineum (area between the vagina and rectum) can suppress unwanted bladder contractions (e.g., sitting on the arm of a chair or the edge of a firm chair).

**3) MENTAL DISTRACTION** - When the bladder contracts at inappropriate times, try to distract your mind by concentrating on something other than the toilet and emptying your bladder. Anything will do (e.g., mental arithmetic, the shopping list). Breathing exercises or other relaxation techniques can also be good distractions.

## **Drug Therapy**

Some drugs can help the bladder to relax and decrease the number of unwanted contractions. These can be used together with bladder retraining techniques, but they do tend to have side effects. Use of these drugs does not reduce the need to use the techniques explained here to gain control of your bladder.

*Bladder retraining takes time, but has no side effects. Stick with it!*

***For more information, contact:***

National Association for Continence [www.nafc.org](http://www.nafc.org) (800) BLADDER  
The Simon Foundation for Continence [www.simonfoundation.org](http://www.simonfoundation.org) (800) 23-SIMON  
American Urological Association [www.aua.net.org](http://www.aua.net.org) (410) 727-1000

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