Bladder information

Many people have bladder symptoms at some time in their lives. It isn't rare, nor is it restricted to elderly people. Following the basic bladder information and advice on this sheet may help with improving your symptoms. This information can be used in conjunction with a specific personalised pelvic floor exercise programme which your physiotherapist specialising in bladder/bowel control can discuss with you.

What is normal bladder function?

Ideally, the bladder should be emptied every three to four waking hours, which is approximately five to six times a day. Your urine should be a pale yellow colour.

It is considered normal to be woken from sleep once at night to empty your bladder, but it may be more than this once you are over 70 years of age. For people in this age group, the average total number of toilet visits in 24 hours is between seven and nine. Medication may have an effect on this.

How much should I drink?

Try to drink one and a half to two litres/ three to four pints/ six to eight large glasses/mugs of fluid per day. It may help to try taking sips of water throughout the day if you find drinking a glassful in one go difficult.

Avoid caffeine (including green tea), fizzy drinks and alcohol as these can cause you to produce more urine or have an irritated bladder.

If you have to get up more than once at night, try not to drink for two hours before you go to bed.

How can I help my bladder symptoms myself?

Bladder training can help you to cut down the number of times you have to go to the toilet (pass urine) every day. This is done by getting your bladder to gradually increase the amount of urine that it can hold. It can also help to reduce the urgency and help you to control the urges that cause you to dash to the toilet.

If you empty your bladder more than six to eight times a day or you get a strong desire to go, try to keep calm. The more anxious you become, the more urgent the need to go to the toilet is. Try to hold on by doing the following:

- Stand still or sit down on something firm.
- Squeeze up your pelvic floor (see advice below).
- Distract your mind by thinking or doing something else.
- The urge will go away or reduce after 10-20 seconds. Try to defer going for five minutes initially, gradually increasing the time you can hold on for.
- Gradually increase the time between toilet visits until you are only going six to eight times a day and no more than once at night.
- Avoid going to the toilet 'just in case'.
- Gradually cut down on drinks containing caffeine and replace these with decaffeinated or non-caffeinated drinks. Note that Green Tea is high in caffeine.
- Avoid or reduce your intake of fizzy drinks and alcohol.

Pelvic floor exercises

A specialist women's and men's health physiotherapist can advise you on an individualised programme of pelvic floor exercises. Your GP or consultant can refer you. Information on the pelvic floor muscles is available in the following leaflets which can be obtained from your specialist physiotherapist: 'Pelvic floor exercises: tailored to you' and 'Pelvic floor muscle problems – don't suffer in silence'.
Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Link: https://www.poole.nhs.uk/a-z-services/t/therapy-services/therapy-outpatients/patient-information-leaflets/women-health-exercises--info.aspx

How can I find my pelvic floor muscles?

- Choose any comfortable position, with your knees slightly apart.
- Tighten up your back passage as though you are trying to stop passing wind.
- Then tighten the muscles that you would use to stop yourself from passing urine.
- Do these two actions together and you should be exercising your pelvic floor muscles.

Remember to do your exercises several times a day.

Slow exercises

Gradually tighten the muscles and try to hold for up to a count of 10. This helps the muscles to support your bladder and bowel.

Fast exercises

Tighten and relax the muscles quickly. This helps the muscles to stop the urine leaking when you sneeze, laugh or exercise.

Build up to doing eight slow exercises and eight fast exercises three times each day.

How can I make sure that I empty my bladder properly?

It is important to sit relaxed on the toilet seat and avoid hovering over it. If, after passing urine, you feel that your bladder is not completely empty, try putting pressure with two hands over your lower tummy, just above the pubic bone, and lean forward. If this does not help, follow this with standing up astride the toilet seat and bend forward slightly. If you still feel that you are struggling to fully empty your bladder, you may need to be referred for a bladder scan.

Post-void dribble

This may be caused by a small amount of urine remaining in the urethra after passing urine, which then leaks out onto your underwear.

Try to perform the bladder emptying advice above, and follow that with a strong pelvic floor contraction. Then press the toilet paper against the area the urine comes from after this to 'blot 'if necessary.

Further information

For further information relating to the bladder or bowel, including products available see:
www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Contact details

Therapy Services Poole: 0300 019 2121
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