

## Pelvic health physiotherapy

# Bladder retraining

## Information for patients

### Introduction

This leaflet provides information and advice about bladder retraining. We hope it will answer some of the questions that you, or those who care for you, may have. This leaflet is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team but aims to help you understand more about what you have discussed.

### Why do I need to train my bladder?

Symptoms like frequency (emptying too often), urgency (feeling desperate to go) or urge incontinence (leaking urine before reaching the toilet) mean that the bladder is not working as it should. There are many causes for this, but bladder training can help to get things back to normal.

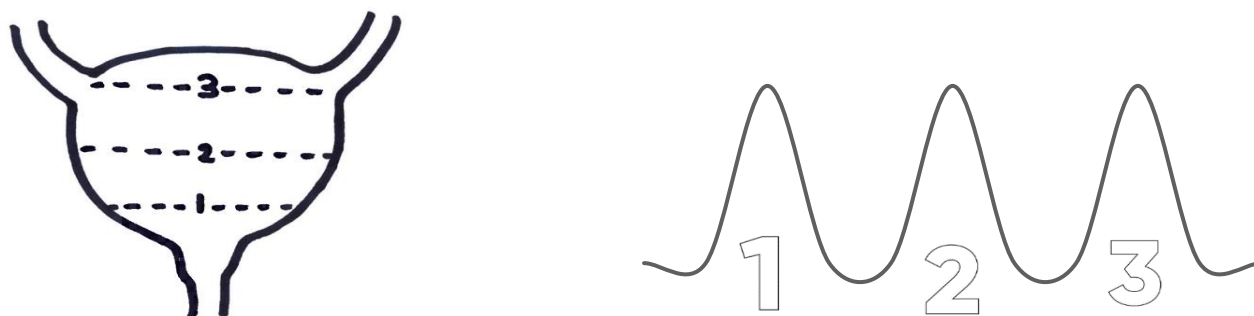
### Normal bladder habits

This is the process through which we store and release urine voluntarily. A 'normal' bladder will need to empty four to seven times over a 24-hour period (roughly every three to four hours), if we drink a regular amount (1.5-2L). Although this will vary for everyone. The maximum we can hold in our bladder is around 400-600mls and our biggest wee is often in the morning. We often empty with a partly full bladder in the day, approximately 200-400mls.

If your bladder wakes you up at night, stop drinking fluids at least two hours before bedtime. Try to 'hold on' for a couple of hours in the evening so that the bladder stretches a little and you can have a good empty just before bed.

As the bladder fills, we get 3 waves of urgency. Like a wave, the urgency will reduce again if we distract ourselves. We use this to our advantage in bladder training. We are training the bladder to do its job of filling, holding, and then emptying for us. This helps to control frequency, urgency and urge incontinence. It also helps to improve the size of the bladder or capacity. You should notice improvements within a few weeks of starting bladder training. You should then become more confident with your bladder.

Urgency waves



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# Bladder retraining

## Tips for holding on:

### Body:

- sit on a hard seat, rolled towel or over the arm of a chair
- lift your pelvic floor muscles for between 10 and 20 seconds - this will help relax the bladder and the urge may disappear
- press on your perineum or the back of your legs
- if standing, go up and down on your toes
- scrunch your toes up
- cross your legs

### Mind:

- distract yourself e.g., think about what you are having for dinner, tidy the house, make a list, send a text message
- count to 60 before going to the toilet or count backwards to distract yourself
- keep calm and relaxed
- concentrate on quiet breathing and follow relaxation methods / breathing exercises

## Getting to the bathroom calmly

It is often difficult to hold on just as the toilet is in sight. Or when we hear running water for example. Often, we rush and only just make it, or we leak urine just before we get to the toilet. Rushing can make the likelihood of you leaking worse. Instead, whilst walking to the toilet, if the urgency increases you should stop walking. Take calm deep breaths and try some of the 'tips for holding on', until the urgency reduces, and you feel able to walk calmly to the toilet again (remember the urgency wave). Repeat this as often as needed to keep control on the way to the toilet.

Lots of people find that their bladder wants to empty as soon as they put their key in the front door. This is a well-recognised symptom and is called '**latchkey incontinence**'. It is just a more extreme version of the bathroom urgency. Your brain is telling the bladder that you are 'almost there' and the bladder responds as though it has been given permission to empty. Anticipate that this may happen. Use the 'tips for holding on' at the front door. Do not put the key in the door until the urge has gone away. Try and distract yourself as much as possible to delay going to the toilet when you walk in the door. The more you practice this, the better you will get at it, but you must do it **every** time.

## Increasing time between wees

**Only start this stage when you can get to the bathroom calmly every time.** When you first get the urge to pass urine, try to hold on. It might be just a minute or two to start with, but over time you can gradually increase this to half an hour then one hour.

Some people find that they get a strong urge when they stand up after sitting down for a while. This is because the back of the thighs have sensory nerves that help to stop the bladder emptying, and the pressure of the chair has stimulated these. If this is a problem for you, use your fingers to rub the back of your thighs as you stand, then keep doing this until the urge wears off.

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Always remember – as well as being influenced by muscles and nerves, your bladder is very much under the control of your brain...**it is important that you tell it what to do and be consistent!**

## Developing good bladder habits

### Just in case wees

#### **Avoid emptying your bladder ‘just in case’.**

Unfortunately, rather than helping the problem this can make things worse as the bladder gets used to holding less urine. The bladder then becomes more sensitive even when there is very little urine in it to stretch it.

### Fluids

Make sure you drink enough fluids. The bladder prefers to hold diluted watery urine; it does not like concentrated, dark urine as it irritates it.

You should aim to drink about 1.5-2 litres of fluid a day (around 8 or 10 glasses or mugs). Try to spread it evenly throughout the day.

**Some fluids will irritate your bladder and will worsen your symptoms.** Consider cutting down on the following things;

- tea / coffee / green tea / hot chocolate
- fizzy drinks
- citrus fruit juice (orange / grapefruit)
- alcohol: beer / spirits with fizzy mixers / wine (white wine is worse than red)
- low sugar / diet drinks
- acidic food i.e., tomatoes, oranges
- spicy food
- chocolate
- cheese, yogurt, mayonnaise
- vinegar / acidic dressings

#### **Replacement drinks:**

- water
- fruit squash diluted with water
- barley water
- fruit, herbal, peppermint teas
- decaffeinated tea / coffee

### How long will it take to see changes?

It may take a while for your bladder to get back to normal completely. Some people notice changes within a week of following the advice from their Physiotherapist and in this leaflet. For others it can take much longer.

Sometimes, external factors such as diet, illness, hormones or stress can influence the bladder and cause small setbacks, but don't be disheartened. Keep following this advice and things should improve.

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## Is there anything else that can help?

Maintaining a **healthy body weight** will help with bladder symptoms. If you are very overweight, even losing just a few kilos can make a big difference.

**Giving up smoking.** Nicotine is a bladder irritant and can make symptoms worse. Smoking also tends to cause a frequent cough, which adds to the strain on the pelvic floor muscles.

**Avoid constipation.** A full bowel will put pressure on the bladder and straining to empty the bowel weakens the pelvic floor.

**Medication** can help with these symptoms. Your GP can prescribe this medication if they feel it will help. If you choose to take it, it is important to follow the advice in this leaflet as medication can ease the sensations and urgency, but will not necessarily 'retrain' the bladder into good habits – only you can do this.

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net**. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to:  
Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street,  
London W2 1NY.  
Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**  
Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:  
**imperial.patient.information@nhs.net**

## Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK\_FREE or WiFiSPARK\_PREMIUM