

## Bladder retraining – taking control

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Taking control of the 'urgent need' to pass urine will enable you to take control of your bladder over a period of time and reduce how often you need to go to the toilet.

It is natural to feel the need to rush to the toilet in response to an urgent need to pass urine. However, doing so causes an increased need to pass urine more often and for some becomes a reflex reaction where the bladder starts to empty causing a leak of urine/urge incontinence. The 'urge' feeling can be the first sign that your bladder is filling but may go away if you learn to ignore it.

We would encourage you to try the following tips/techniques to help you control your bladder when you feel the 'urge':

- Stay still; sit or stand, whichever is easier for you, depending on where you are at the time.
- Sitting on the edge of a firm chair may help.
- Take 1-2 deep slow breaths to help you stay calm and relaxed; your chest and stomach should expand, do not pull your tummy in which will squash your bladder and increase urgency.
- Remind yourself that your bladder can hold ½ litre (1 pint) of urine, it stretches (like a balloon when you blow air into it), and it fills very slowly (1-2 millilitres per minute). Therefore there is no reason to rush to the toilet. This should help you to feel more relaxed and in control.
- Remember that the urgent desire to go does not mean that your bladder is full; it can stretch a little more.
- Contract/squeeze your pelvic floor muscles (not stomach or buttock muscles) for 10-15 seconds; your nurse or physio will teach you how. These steps will help reduce or stop the urge to go i.e. switch off the bladder signals to the brain. It also closes the outlet tube from the bladder helping to stop leaks/incontinence.

Once you are in control walk to the toilet and empty your bladder. Avoid rushing as this starts up the feeling of urgency again. If half way to the toilet your urgency increases stand still, take a deep breath and squeeze your muscles to take control and only then continue to the toilet to empty your bladder. Remember it is always at the point of urgency that the bladder can start to empty causing you to leak.

We understand that this is hard work, especially to start with. Please keep trying and don't give up; it gets easier over time and will improve your bladder problems.

**Once you are able to avoid rushing to the toilet on a regular basis you can start to delay passing urine for small increased time periods e.g.**

1. Hold for 2 minutes
2. Hold for 3-5 minutes
3. Hold for 5-7 minutes
4. Gradually increase these intervals as you are able

Mental distraction at this point is very useful e.g.

- Counting backwards from 100 in lots of 8's; takes much concentration!
- Word puzzles

You will find that you need to pass urine less often as your bladder learns to stretch and to stay relaxed as it fills up.

Ladies, do not hover over the toilet seat, sit down so that you can fully empty your bladder. Ladies and gentlemen, do not strain/ push to empty your bladder, this will only weaken your pelvic floor muscles.

Bladder retraining will take a while to work. It has been well researched and has helped many people to regain bladder control.

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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