

Bladder Retraining Guide

How Does Bladder Retraining Work?

Bladder retraining helps you to begin to hold more urine for longer periods of time. It is possible to train your bladder to do this by gradually increasing the time between each visit to the toilet.

This method sounds simple, however bladder retraining takes time and determination and will not work overnight. To have a chance of successful bladder retraining you must try and ignore the feeling that you need to go to the toilet for as long as possible.

If you can learn to ignore the feeling that you need to go straight away, your bladder will begin to relax and will become less irritable. It is possible for you to be in control of your bladder and not the other way round.

How Do You Begin To Retrain The Bladder?

- You must try and resist the messages that your bladder sends to you telling you that you need to go to the toilet. If you continue to respond to those messages and go to the toilet each time you feel the urge to go, your feelings of urgency or frequency will continue and possibly get worse.
- Resisting messages from your bladder will not be easy. When you listen to the messages and relieve yourself, you find immediate relief – but of course it is only temporary, because you will start feeling uncomfortable again, after only a very short time. This cycle of discomfort, even panic, followed by brief relief is very hard to break. You need to be strong and focused.
- Try and empty your bladder after you experience feelings of urgency or first thing in the morning then delay the next toilet visit by a set time. Every 7 days (week) increase the amount of time you delay voiding your bladder. You will need to be patient and not be put off if you have accidents and failures, especially at first. You may feel rather silly living your voiding schedule by a stopwatch, but very often this method works and can make your life a great deal easier.
- **At night, empty your bladder 1 to 2 hours before you go to bed and then try to resist any further urges to empty your bladder before you go to sleep.**

- To help identify your bladder habits and patterns start a retraining diary; recording the time you go to the toilet, how long you can wait until you go to the toilet, what you drink and so on.

A Retraining Diary (with instructions) is provided with Part 7 of this report.

- From the Retraining Diary you will be able to identify how long your bladder can hold on until it needs to be emptied. From here, you can set realistic goals that can help your bladder become stronger.
- When you have set your goals, try not to rush to the toilet as soon as the time is up. Try if possible to take your time. Use one or more of the Holding Techniques offered below on page 3 to keep you calm.

How To Make Bladder Retraining Successful

The following are some things that may help make your bladder retraining successful:

- **Plan** your retraining schedule clearly with realistic and achievable goals.
- **Know** where the toilets are when you are out and about.
- **Focus** on success – not on setbacks.
- **Be patient**; bladder retraining will not be an overnight success. You will need to work hard at it for some weeks.
- **Be aware** of any fears or worries associated with your bladder problem. In some cases these fears or worries will need to be tackled before long-lasting success is possible.
- **If concerned about having an accident** while retraining, consider wearing light protection. Perhaps an absorbent pad in your pants, or special underwear designed to mop up leakages. These will remove the worry and the hassle of having to change frequently during this time of retraining your bladder.
- **If you find you are getting nowhere** after 2 to 3 weeks of work, then consider consulting your doctor or a specialist or continence physiotherapist. It may be that some other medical cause is preventing your success like a persistent infection or some damage to your bladder mechanism.

Holding Techniques

When the urge hits, find ways to distract yourself or at least lessen the urge to go.

1. Distraction techniques to accomplish this include:

- Listening to music
- Repeating a mantra
- Reading something
- Doing a cross-word puzzle
- Playing a game on your mobile
- Watching a TV series
- Even making a phone call to someone who'll understand you just need to talk for a few minutes.

2. **Shift your position** - Sit on a hard surface like the corner of a table. Leaning slightly forward can also sometimes take pressure off the stomach and bladder, which may reduce the feeling that you need to go. If this position change doesn't help, try to find another that does.

3. **Tiptoe** – When you are standing and have the urge to go, try standing on your toes to reduce pressure on the muscles

4. **Remove any liquids from view** - They can just remind you that you need to go.

5. **Try the 'Quick Flick' technique** - When you feel the urge to urinate, the 'Quick Flick' technique can be applied. Contract your pelvic floor muscles quickly 3-5 times, taking slow deep breaths whilst you do so. This should reduce the need to urinate so you can hold off going to the toilet for longer intervals.

6. **Use the 'Knack Manoeuvre'** - When you are about to cough or sneeze, apply 'The Knack' manoeuvre. This is the conscious contraction of the pelvic floor muscles before and during your bladder being put under stress. This prevents the urethra and bottom of the bladder from descending which can lead to incontinence. You may need supervision and training to learn how to make this most effective with the help of a specialist physiotherapist that deals with incontinence and pelvic floor issues.

Lifestyle Changes

Wear easy-to-remove clothing - If clothing has become a barrier, due to an issue with undoing buttons and zips on trousers for example, there are garments available that are easy to remove and put back on. They are often elasticated and lightweight.

Know where the toilet is – When out and about, always scout out the area you are going to be in before hand, so that you are prepared and know exactly where and how far away the toilet is from where you are situated.

Diet changes (for urinary incontinence) - Avoid foods and drinks which act as diuretics, causing your kidneys to produce more urine. This includes avoiding caffeine, fizzy drinks and alcohol.

Medications – Check with your GP that your medications are not causing your urge or frequency symptoms. If so, discuss other options.

Weight – Even a modest 5-10% weight loss can help your urge incontinence and take the strain off your pelvic floor too!

Pelvic Floor Exercises (Kegels) – These exercises are essential for incontinence issues. Results can take up to 3 months but, strengthening your pelvic floor muscles means that your bladder and pelvic organs won't sag and cause leaks.

Kegels are considered to have the greatest success rate at treating urge incontinence; pelvic floor exercises are part of any treatment plan.

Strengthen your pelvic floor over a 12 week programme to better support your bladder and give you better control over your urethra. Follow this programme with weekly maintenance exercises to ensure your incontinence does not return. In addition, you will also benefit from an improved sex life and better bowel movements.

If manual Kegels don't work for you, you can consider an electronic pelvic toner.