

Bladder Retraining

Bladder retraining refers to reeducating your bladder and regaining control of urination. This is accomplished by consciously suppressing any sensation of urgency and voiding only at scheduled times, regardless of whether or not the urge is felt at those times. For reasons that are not entirely clear, many individuals lose the ability to suppress their bladder, and when spasms occur, urgency or even incontinence occurs. The goal of bladder retraining is to break the cycle of frequency, urgency, and incontinence by allowing you to take control of your bladder.

The success rate of bladder retraining is impressive. Most studies have reported cure rates approaching 85%. Bladder retraining has been effectively used to treat bladder spasms (also called “detrusor instability”), urinary frequency and urgency (“sensory urgency”) stress incontinence, and a condition called interstitial cystitis. Besides being an extremely effective treatment, another important feature of bladder retraining is that it is virtually free of any side effects!

Preparation for Bladder Retraining

In order to get started with bladder retraining, the first thing you need to do is to keep a diary of your voiding habits for a few days. You will be provided with a blank diary. Your doctor will use the information from this diary to determine the best voiding schedule for you.

Instructions for Bladder retraining

1. For the next 7 days, empty your bladder every 1 hour(s) during waking hours. Attempt to void at these times whether or not you feel an urge to void. Do not void between the scheduled times even if the urge is present. You will not be asked to keep this schedule during sleeping hours; only get up when you feel an urge to urinate. If you can keep to the schedule during the day, any nighttime problem will take care of itself.
2. For the next 7 days, empty your bladder every 1 1/2 hours(s) during waking hours. Follow the same instructions as above.
3. Every 7 days, increase the interval between voids by 30 minutes until you are voiding every 3 – 4 hours. You should maintain this interval indefinitely!

Distraction Techniques

If you feel an urge to void before the scheduled time, there are several methods you can use to make the urge go away. The rule of bladder retraining is that you are not allowed to use the bathroom before the scheduled time, even if that means having an accident! Above all, do not panic or rush to the bathroom; this will only make the urgency worse. The feeling of urgency is just that; a feeling. It is an early warning sign to get to a bathroom. Using these distraction techniques, the urge will eventually pass and you will be able to wait until your scheduled time.

- **Stand still**, or if possible, sit down and keep your legs together.
- **Squeeze your pelvic muscles tightly** (Kegel exercises) several times in rapid succession, without fully relaxing them between squeezes. (If you are not familiar with Kegel exercises, ask your clinician to teach you this technique.)
- **Take 3 slow deep breaths** and relax your abdominal muscles.

You can try to distract your self by trying one of the following activities:

- Balance your checkbook.
- Count down from 100 by 7's.
- Make a list of chores.
- Think of something fun to do.

Fluid Management

Drinking the proper amount of fluid is an important part of your health. Drinking too little fluid causes the urine to be concentrated and may irritate the bladder wall. On the other hand, drinking too much fluid leads to frequency of urination and makes bladder retraining difficult. You will need to find a happy medium! You should not restrict your fluid intake, although an excess of fluid should be avoided as well. Try to drink approximately **six to eight, 8-ounce glasses of fluid each day**. Limit fluid intake in the evening hours before sleep, as this will lessen your need to wake up to urinate during the night.

It is expected that you will experience some accidents during this bladder-retraining program. That is normal. The goal is to get control of your bladder and not to give in to the urges you feel. You should be able to control your bladder, and not let your bladder run your life. Remember.....*Mind over Bladder!*