

Bladder Training

The purpose of bladder retraining is to learn to suppress or ignore the desire to pass water, so that you can get back to a more normal pattern of going to the toilet. What you are doing is making the bladder tolerate being stretched as it fills. This should mean you do not need to go to the toilet so often or with such urgency and should mean an end to any incontinent episodes.

Your aim, assuming an average intake of 3-4 pints (2 litres) of liquid a day, is to get back to a normal pattern of emptying your bladder no more than six to eight times a day. (The bladder should be able to hold between three-quarters of a pint and a whole pint (400-600 ml) before it needs to be emptied, and the first sensation of a need to empty it usually comes when it is only half full.

Bladder retraining is best done with the help of a Urologist, physiotherapist or a continence nurse specialist (your GP will put you in touch with your local one or else you can phone the Continence Foundation Helpline for details of local services) - but it is possible to go it alone.

To start bladder retraining, you need to keep a record of how often you pass water during the day. This record should be kept initially for one week. It also allows you to record any accidental episodes of incontinence. You may also measure the amount you drink and the amount of urine you pass, using a measuring jug, and record this on a more detailed chart.

Once the record is completed you can work out how often, on average, you pass water (and, if you have recorded it, the average amount passed). You can then set your first target. Suppose you have been passing urine about every hour: your first target might be to go to the toilet only every hour and a half. You can aim also to increase the average amount you pass each time.

You may wonder how you are going to manage to hang on for that extra half hour. There are various techniques which may help. When you get the urge to pass urine:-

1. Sit on a hard seat or across a tightly rolled towel. This puts pressure on the pelvic floor muscles.
2. When your bladder contracts, and you feel an urgent need to empty it, do five quick squeezes of your pelvic floor muscles. Squeezing the muscles in the pelvic floor sends a message to your bladder which helps calm it down.