

Information for Women

Self-Managing Your Urinary Symptoms

SPHERE Bladder and Bowel Service

Supporting Pelvic Health through Empowerment
Rehabilitation and Education

Index

Self-managing your urinary symptoms	4
Fluid and Bladder Diary	5
What is the diary for?	6
How long do I need to do this?	6
What do I need?	6
What do I do?	6
What should I avoid?	7
Making changes	7
Change the type of fluid you drink	7
Change the amount of fluid you drink	8
Change the timing of your drinks.....	9
Get a good night's sleep.....	9
Avoid constipation	10
Empty your bladder fully.....	11
Review the medicines you are taking.....	11
Train your bladder to hold more urine and empty less often	12
Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles.....	13
Your Exercise Programme (Slow and fast)	13
Ways to check you are doing your pelvic floor exercises correctly	14
Other factors	15
Why Not Make It Happen?	15

Self-managing your urinary symptoms

Do you regularly feel you have any of these?

You find it difficult to postpone or hold off using the toilet when you need to go, even for a few minutes?

Yes No

You have to go to the toilet too often during the day?

Yes No

You have to get up twice or more to pass urine during the night?

Yes No

You feel as if you have not fully emptied your bladder after you have used the toilet?

Yes No

You have a weak urine stream?

Yes No

You have to strain to start passing urine?

Yes No

You stop and start when you are passing urine?

Yes No

These are some of the most frequent urinary symptoms found in women. They are more common than urinary leakage (sometimes called incontinence) and they can occur on their own or as well as urinary leakage.

Many urinary symptoms can be helped or cured with simple changes you can make yourself.

First, you need to understand a bit about your bladder and what your own bladder habits are. The best way to do this is to keep a diary, like the one below.

Fluid and Bladder Diary

Fluid in			Urine Out		Comments		
Time	Type of drink	Amount (in mls)	Time	Amount (in mls)	How Urgent 1-3 (3 = most urgent)	leakage Damp Wet/soaked	Activity at time e.g. reaching front door
07.00	Coffee	200mls	6.30	400mls	3	damp	On way to toilet
10.00	Tea	200mls	7.30	100mls	2	damp	coughing
1pm	Cola	200mls	8.30	100mls	3	damp	On way to toilet
Totals		600mls	Totals	600mls			

What is the diary for?

This diary will give important information about your bladder. It shows how much your bladder holds, how often you empty your bladder and any leakage. It also shows the amount and types of fluids taken.

How long do I need to do this?

For three days and three nights (ideally in a row).

Use a different diary for each day, starting when you first get up in the morning.

What do I need?

You will need a measuring jug, your diary and a pen.

What do I do?

For urine: every time you empty your bladder, pass your urine into the jug. When you have finished, put your jug on a level surface and read in millilitres (mls) how much urine it contains. Write down the time and the amount in the diary. Flush the urine down the toilet and rinse the jug.

If you are unable to measure the urine (e.g. when out at shops), write the time and tick the urine column or write small, medium or large.

For drinks: every time you have a drink, write down the time (remember you don't drink and pass urine at the same time), amount and what you had to drink e.g. tea, cola or water. You might find it easier to measure your favourite mug or cup and then use it for these 3 days.

For urgency: write down how strongly you felt the urge to empty your bladder scoring:

1 – slight urge

2 – strong urge

3 – very hard to hold on.

For leakage: any time you have a urine leak, whatever the amount, write down the time and how wet you felt. In the activity column, write down what you were doing at the time of leakage. This could be a cough, a sudden movement or on your way to the toilet or reaching home.

What should I avoid?

Please don't change anything until after filling out the diary. Drink what you usually drink and go to the toilet as normal. It is important that we can see the pattern of how your bladder is behaving.

Making changes

The information below will help you to decide what you want to change from the symptoms you have identified previously. Try and change only one habit at a time so you can work out what changes help you. If, after a few days, you notice an improvement carry on with this change, even if you decide to change something else you can add it to the change you have already made. Keep a diary for 3 days before you start and repeat it after you have made your changes. This will tell you if the changes you have made are working.

Change the type of fluid you drink

Drinks with caffeine in them, such as lucozade, energy drinks or coffee can irritate your bladder and your body may produce more urine. This can make you want to pass urine more often and more urgently, including during the night. If you want to reduce your caffeine, do it over a few days. Try replacing caffeinated drinks with non-caffeine containing drinks, e.g. decaffeinated tea or coffee, fruit teas, water or juice (not cola or irn-bru). Do this for at least two full weeks to see if you notice any changes.

Change the amount of fluid you drink

You should try to drink an adequate amount of fluid each day, which includes liquid foods such as soup, ice-cream and the milk in your cereal. This fluid can be any type and does not have to be just water – most drinks are made with water! The chart below provides you with some guide as to how much you should drink based on your weight:-

Weight (Stones)	Weight (kgs)	Mls per day	Fluid oz	Pints	Mugs
6	38	1190	42	2.1	4
7	45	1275	49	2.5	5
8	51	1446	56	2.75	5-6
9	57	1786	63	3.1	6
10	64	1981	70	3.5	7
11	70	2179	77	3.75	7-8
12	76	2377	84	4.2	8
13	83	2575	91	4.5	9
14	89	2773	98	4.9	10
15	95	2971	105	5.25	10-11
16	102	3136	112	5.5	11

Change the timing of your drinks

If you are bothered by the need to get up at night to pass urine you may have to stop drinking after a certain time at night, ideally 2-3 hours before going to bed.

The most common reason for getting up at night is because your body makes more urine overnight than when you were younger.

When you drink does not seem to affect this. If you stop drinking you will reduce the amount of fluids you drink overall and this can cause dehydration, constipation, make your mouth dry and sore and possibly make your symptoms worse. It is better to sip small amounts of fluid rather than stop all fluids after a set time in the evening. Try sucking ice-cubes or ice-lollies.

Putting your legs up in the afternoon and evening may help – you should make sure your legs are raised above the level of your heart, so resting your legs on the arm of a sofa should do this.

This will drain leg swelling, reducing the amount of fluid in your body that needs to drain overnight, which may help to reduce your need to get up for the toilet.

Support stockings may also be used to help with the drainage and stop leg or ankle swelling during the day, **but** these should only be used once you have discussed it with your doctor because they may not be suitable for you.

Get a good night's sleep

One of the main reasons people get up during the night is because of disturbed sleep. This can be because they feel too cold, hot, are uncomfortable or are in pain. It is worthwhile paying attention to your sleeping comforts by making sure you are comfortable in bed and not disturbed by noise. Ear plugs can help, dark curtains are good. See your doctor about any ongoing pain you have that disturbs your sleep patterns.

Avoid constipation

Having a full bowel can put pressure on your bladder which can make it difficult to empty your bladder properly. This can make you feel you need to pass urine very frequently. It can also mean that when you do pass urine you don't empty your bladder fully. Trying to maintain a good bowel routine may help your urinary symptoms. Unless you have been told differently by your doctor, drink between 6 and 8 cups or glasses of fluid each day. Try and eat more fibre. You can do this by increasing your fruit and vegetable intake, by eating wholegrain cereals, porridge, wholemeal bread and pulses, such as beans and lentils. Increase fibre in your diet gradually over a few weeks, to allow your body to adjust. The recommended daily intake is 25-30grams – for example a large slice of wholegrain bread usually has about 3 grams fibre, half cup baked beans has 6.5 grams fibre, an apple or pear has 4 grams fibre, a tomato has 1 gram, a potato 3 grams and a portion of cabbage has 2 grams. A portion of porridge contains 3 grams fibre.

Increasing physical activity is a good way to help with constipation. This should be done gently using small changes to your everyday routine, e.g. use the stairs rather than a lift or escalator, get off the bus one or two stops before your own and walk the rest of the way, go swimming or join an exercise class. If physical activity is going to be of benefit to you it must be moderately active and make you slightly warmer and/or slightly more breathless than normal. Some of the best exercise includes walking fast enough to get you slightly warmer and slightly breathless.

The recommended amount is 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day but you do not have to do this all in one half hour session. Build it up in 5 or 10 minute bouts of increased physical activity, several times each day.

It is useful to set goals for yourself, be positive, reward yourself and get your friends and family to encourage you.

Your doctor may be able to help you further by prescribing laxatives. You should talk to your doctor about what is best for you.

If being constipated is a change from your usual bowel habits you should speak to your doctor. A change in your bowel habits may indicate a serious medical illness.

Empty your bladder fully

If you feel you are not emptying your bladder completely, have a weak urine flow or have to strain to pass urine, firstly you should see your doctor. These can all indicate medical conditions that may be treatable. You can also try several ways to help:

Double voiding: after passing urine try rocking gently backwards and forwards while sitting on the toilet. If you pass more urine, this is fine, if not, stand up, count to 20 and sit back down on the toilet and attempt to urinate again. You should then feel your bladder completely empty.

Finding bladder emptying trigger points by stroking your inner thigh or tapping over your bladder can help you to empty fully. Gentle pressing with both hands may also help. It is important to your bladder that you feel comfortable and safe on the toilet so that you can relax your muscles properly therefore do not hover or crouch over the toilet. You should avoid straining when trying to empty your bladder.

Review the medicines you are taking

Many tablets and medications can cause bladder and bowel symptoms or make the symptoms you have worse. If you have noticed any changes in your bladder habits since starting new medication you may want to discuss this with your doctor.

Train your bladder to hold more urine and empty less often

Many women develop urinary symptoms of urgency and frequency as a result of long term habits such as rushing to the toilet as soon as the urge is felt and going to the toilet 'just in case', when they don't have a full bladder. Your bladder will become used to holding smaller amounts of urine if you do this and because it is not being stretched it will shrink. Your bladder can be trained to hold more urine until it is convenient for you to reach a toilet. Training your bladder takes time and you need to be determined, but it can be very successful.

There are 3 parts to bladder training:

- 1 Becoming aware of your own bladder patterns and habits by keeping a bladder diary for 3-5 days and nights
- 2 Learning techniques to distract you away from the feelings of urge to use the toilet. You can try reciting your times tables, or a favourite poem, doing Sudoku or singing. Standing on your tiptoes can help or sitting on a hard surface. Doing 5 quick 'squeezes' of your pelvic floor muscles when you feel the urge can calm it down.
- 3 Extending the times between using the toilet. You set your target based on your usual pattern. At first you might hold off for 5 – 10 minutes when you feel the urge to go (using your distraction techniques to help you do this). When you have managed that for a few days you could try holding off for longer – maybe 20 minutes or half an hour. It is a trial and error process and tends to be easier to do in the morning than evenings. Keep persevering as you will begin to see some benefit after a few days of trying. You should aim to use the toilet every 3 to 4 hours during the day. However, if you are drinking 2 litres of fluid this may be 2–3 hourly during the day.

Strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

Pelvic floor muscles hold your bladder, womb and bowels in place. They can become weak after having a baby or because of lack of exercise. They can also become weaker as you get older. With weak pelvic floor muscles you may leak urine. You are never too old to start doing pelvic floor exercises and exercising these muscles regularly may improve your urine leakage. You may need to exercise these muscles for 3–6 months before you notice a change. First you need to learn how to find the muscles. Try to squeeze the muscles that prevent you from emptying your bladder. Try not to tighten your buttocks or stomach muscles or squeeze your legs together; you may feel your lower tummy muscles tightening up but these are not attached to your pelvic floor. Do not hold your breath.

Your Exercise Programme

This consists of **Slow** and **Fast** contractions.

Slow

- Tighten up your pelvic floor muscles and see how long you can hold the contraction.
- Relax fully (for at least as long as you held the contraction)
- Now tighten up again for the same time
- Relax fully
- Repeat this until your muscles get tired

How many seconds can you hold for? seconds

How many times could you repeat it? times

Eventually aim for a 10 second hold repeated 10 times.

Fast

- Quickly tighten up your pelvic floor muscles
- Hold for 1 second and then relax fully
- Repeat this until your muscles get tired.

How many times could you repeat it? times

Eventually aim for 10 times.

To strengthen the muscles it is necessary to repeat the number of slow and fast contractions 5 times every day.

As you get stronger you should increase the time held and number of repetitions.

Once you have gained good control you should maintain your muscles by exercising 2–3 times a day for the rest of your life.

There are a few ways you can check you are doing the exercises properly.

- You can check with a mirror. Hold a small mirror so that you can see the area between your legs. Tighten the muscles. The skin between the anus and vagina should move away from the mirror.
- While sitting or lying you can put your hand on the area in between your legs and tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel movement away from your hand.
- In a comfortable position you can gently insert your thumb or index finger into your vagina. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles. You should feel the muscles move or tighten around your thumb or finger, and then relax.
- If you are having sex, try to exercise your pelvic floor; your partner should be able to feel the muscles tightening.

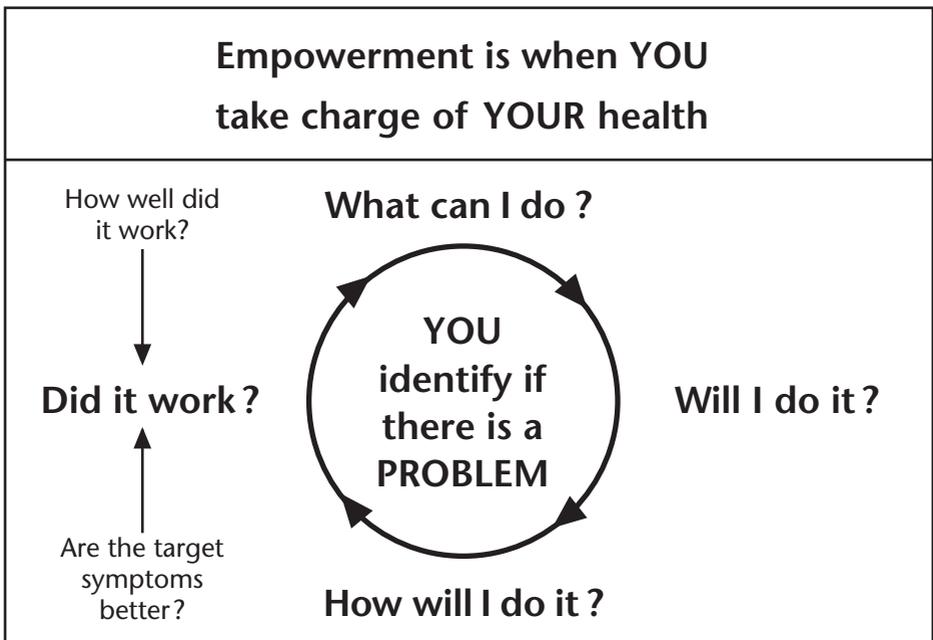
Other Factors

There are other factors that may be important to consider in relation to your urinary symptoms. You should speak to your GP if you have any of the following:

- Pain when you pass urine
- Blood in your urine

Why Not Make It Happen?

Think about your own problem. What would you like to achieve by attending the SPHERE Bladder and Bowel Clinic?



Write down here **one** thing you aim to change before you return to your next clinic appointment:

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