

Have you found more recently that you make many more trips to the loo than in the past? Or when you need to go you REALLY need to go? The first thing you look for on arriving somewhere new is locating the toilet just in case, or maybe before heading out somewhere you go to the loo (even if you don't really need it) just in case? And to keep things 'safe' you may actually cut back on how much you drink to ensure your 'tank' is empty. If your bladder is overactive, it will be sending messages to your brain to say you need to empty your bladder before it is actually full. And the habits mentioned above actually make the problem worse as it re-enforces those messages to the brain.

Throughout a women's adult life, oestrogen has an important role in lower urinary tract function and dysfunction. Postmenopausal oestrogen deficiency causes atrophic changes in the lower urinary tract. Atrophic or atrophy means a wasting away of muscle mass. The lack of oestrogen weakens the muscles of the bladder (which holds urine) and the urethra (the tube that carries urine out of the body), compromising their ability to control urinary functions. Reduced oestrogen also alters the acidity of the vulva and the vagina, which can make the area more prone to infection by bacteria or yeast overgrowth.

An overactive bladder, may make you feel embarrassed, you may want to isolate yourself, or limit your workout and social life. The good news is that a brief evaluation can determine whether there's a specific cause for your overactive bladder symptoms.

Symptoms of an overactive bladder include:

- Feeling a sudden urge to urinate that's difficult to control
- Experiencing accidental loss of urine immediately after an urgent need to urinate (urgency incontinence)
- Urinating frequently, usually eight or more times in 24 hours
- Waking up more than twice in the night to urinate (nocturia).

Even if you are able to get to the toilet in time when you sense an urge to urinate, unexpected frequent urination and night time urination can disrupt your life.

The Busy Bladder

Your symptoms may be managed with simple behavioural strategies, such as dietary changes (including weight loss if necessary), timed voiding and bladder-holding techniques using your pelvic floor muscles. Doing Kegel exercises and strengthening your pelvic floor can aid in improving symptoms. If these initial efforts don't help sufficiently in reducing your symptoms, additional treatments are available.

ACTIVITIES TO HELP BLADDER RE-TRAINING



1 Keeping a Bladder Diary

Keep a diary or note of how frequently you visit the loo or have any accidents. Do this for a few days a month and then repeat at monthly intervals to see if things are improving. Its useful information to show your doctor if you seek further help. You can note down how many times you went in a 24-hour period, and use a plastic jug if possible to measure the volume of urine passed each time. If you record how much you are drinking and the time you can balance that against how frequently and how much you are passing out.



2 Calming Down that Urge to Go

Quite often there are triggers that make you rush to the loo. Washing your hands, hearing running water, putting the key in the front door or just seeing the loo can all make you feel desperate to go. If you are aware of these triggers you can try distract yourself until the urge passes. Sing a song, count backwards, anything to busy your brain away from the signals telling it to rush to the loo.

If you think about little girls needing to wee, what do they do? They often hold on to their 'bits' (maybe not appropriate in public), cross their legs and rock up and down on their toes. You don't realise it but these are all ways that help stimulate the pelvic floor muscles to hold on and in, and

the bladder to calm down. You can do the same thing, however more discreetly, to train your bladder to wait.



3 Strengthening your pelvic floor

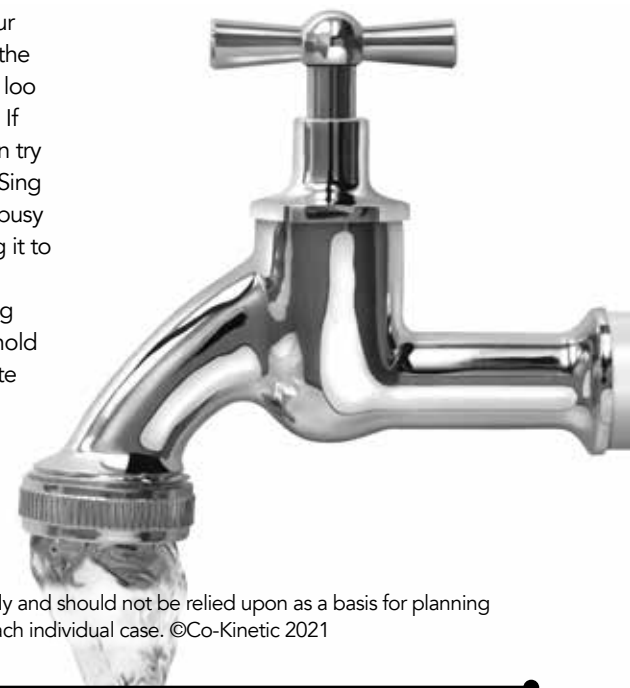
Tightening your pelvic floor muscles can help to calm the bladder down. Activate your pelvic floor pulling it in and up, then hold for as long as you can until the urge to go settles. Having stronger muscle will help control urges and prevent any accidents. Your physical therapist can help guide you through specific Kegel and pelvic floor exercises.



4 Breathe

Sometimes holding your breath or breathing too fast can cause you to leak or feel more urgency. Breathe steadily and calmly and you will have a better chance of holding on.

If you invest in these tips trying to lengthen the time between visits to the loo, you can re-train the messages between your brain and bladder and improve control. It takes time for the bladder to learn to hold on so start by trying to hold on for a few minutes extra at first. Trying to hold on for too long too soon can make you feel frustrated and as though you are not getting anywhere and risk having an accident.



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