

Urinary incontinence at a glance

Pathfinder Team

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at ndht.pals@nhs.net.

The following information is not extensive, and further interventions, help and advice may be required to ensure your needs are met. This is a brief outline of common complaints, problems and concerns.

If issues worsen, seek professional advice from your local GP surgery/practice nurse, community nurse (if you are housebound) or contact our local bladder and bowel care services.

Urinary incontinence at a glance

Types of continence issues:

Stress: When your bladder is under pressure i.e. from sneezing, coughing or lifting and you leak urine.

Urge: When urine leaks as when you feel a sudden urge to pass urine. You may leak urine with that feeling or shortly after that feeling.

Mixed: A combination of both; stress and urge incontinence.

Overflow: When you are unable to pass urine and unable to completely empty your bladder causing frequent leaking and the feeling of needing to pass urine but only passing small amounts.

Total: When your bladder is unable to contain any urine – you experience constant leaking.

Nocturia: Having to get out of bed multiple times over night to pass urine or experience wet beds.

Fecal: Leaking of stools from anus.

Steps to take which can ease urinary incontinence

- Make sure you are drinking enough – aim for 3-4 pints (1.5-2 litres) in 24 hours. Avoid having large drinks in one go; this can cause receptors in your bladder to become aggravated and increase urgency and frequency in passing urine.
- Switch to decaffeinated drinks. Avoid squash with artificial sweeteners/reduced sugar, and energy drinks.
- Reduce alcohol intake and fizzy drink consumption.
- Avoid some herbal teas such as green, fennel, nettle, dandelion and hibiscus tea. Also avoid any drink containing high vitamin C.

Switching to non-irritant drinks such as water, milk, ordinary squash, decaffeinated tea or coffee can reduce some bladder problems.

Exercise for pelvic floor

What is a pelvic floor?

Both men and women have pelvic floor muscles.

A pelvic floor is a muscle at the bottom of your pelvis which is attached to the pubic bone at the front and the coccyx at the back. These muscles support the pelvic organs and help to close the outlet from bowels and bladder keeping leakages at bay.

Just like any muscle, it needs to be exercised to stay strong.

How to find the pelvic floor

Sit comfortably and breathe normally. Imagine you are trying to stop yourself from passing wind. Try not to clench your buttocks. Once you have done this, try pulling your back passage up towards your navel.

Exercises

Once you have managed to find your pelvic floor and practiced pulling the muscle up as though in a line or on a piece of string, try and hold the muscle at the top for 10 seconds, then relax for 5 seconds. Repeat this up to 10 times if able. If not, do it as often as you can and build up to 10 seconds 10 times.

These can be done either sitting or standing. Try and do these when you are not busy or doing something else.

It can take 3-6 months to start seeing an improvement! KEEP GOING!

Bladder retraining

It is very natural to feel the need to rush to the toilet urgently. However, by doing this you are increasing the need to pass urine more often which can cause urge incontinence.

The 'urge' feeling may be a sign your bladder is filling, but this can go away if you can learn to ignore it.

How to control the 'urge':

If safe to do so, stand or sit still (maybe on the edge of the chair).

Take a couple of deep breaths expanding your chest and stomach, but not your lower tummy.

Remember your bladder can hold up to 1 pint (1/2 a litre) of urine comfortably and fills very slowly (1-2mls per minute).

Squeeze your pelvic floor muscle for about 20 seconds. This can help 'switch off' the bladder signals to the brain.

Once you have gained control, walk to the toilet at a normal pace. If the 'urge' feeling returns, stand still (if safe to do so) and regain control.

Once you have mastered this, you can then increase the periods of time to wait to avoid rushing. Hold for 2 minutes, then 3-5 minutes, then 5-7 minutes.

Mental distraction can also help; try counting backwards from 100.

You will find that you need to pass urine less often as your bladder re learns how to stretch.

If you find that you are experiencing incontinence, there are many products available in supermarkets/chemists. They can be found for both men and women and in many different styles, sizes and fittings. By using these products, it can ease concerns/anxiety of leaking urine. Using these items can reassure that any leakage will be contained.

Bladder and bowel care team

Our bladder and bowel care team comprises of specialist nurses and specialist physiotherapists. If a referral has been made to the bladder and bowel care team, please be aware there will be documents to complete and to be sent back prior to an appointment being made.

If you are housebound and have requested a referral for further advice and help with urinary incontinence, your referral will be sent to your local community nursing team who will be able to assist you either in one of their clinics, in your own home, or over the telephone.

Be assured if you would like a companion to your appointments, this is welcomed. Please ensure you inform the nurse at time of booking your appointment.

Many products can be sourced in local supermarkets, pharmacies and online. This may be of some reassurance while you are waiting for your appointment.

If you are suffering from any lower urinary tract symptoms, please contact your GP or healthcare staff who are looking after you for advice.

Team locations and contact numbers:

North and Mid Devon – Crown Yealm House, South Molton Tel: 01392 675336

South Devon – Newton Abbot Hospital Tel: 01626 324685

East Devon – Franklyn House, St Thomas, Exeter Tel: 01392 208478

Further information

Pathfinder Team
Tel: 01271 313975

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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