

Hospital contacts

For more information on bladder retraining, please contact your GP or:

- **Carlene Igbedioh**, Continence Nurse Specialist for Elderly Care, on **020 7188 2083** Monday to Wednesday and Friday or **020 7188 2093** on Thursdays;
- **Elaine Hazell**, Continence Nurse Specialist for Urology, on **020 7188 6783** Monday to Friday; or
- **Ellie Stewart**, Urogynaecology Nurse Specialist for Women's Services on **020 7188 3671** Mondays and Tuesdays only. If you leave a message on her answer machine, she will contact you on her return.

PALS. If you need information, support or advice about our services, you can contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Ask a member of hospital staff to direct you to the PALS office or phone **020 7188 8801** at St Thomas' or **020 7188 8803** at Guy's. Email pals@gstt.nhs.uk.

Language Support Services. If you need an interpreter or information about the care you are receiving in the language or format of your choice, please call **020 7188 8815**, fax **020 7188 5953** or email languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

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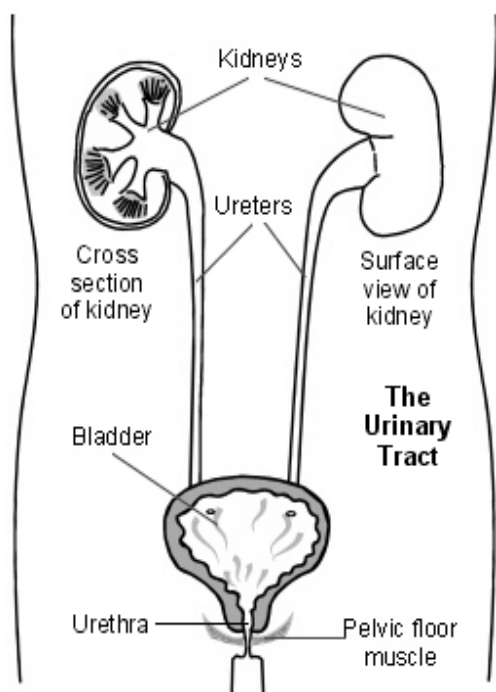
Bladder retraining – treatment for urge incontinence

This information sheet explains what urge incontinence is and how we can help to reduce and relieve your symptoms. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to one of the nurse specialists.

information

How do your bladder and kidneys normally work?

Your kidneys continually filter your blood by removing excess water and waste, which forms a solution called urine. This travels to your bladder, which acts as a temporary store until it is passed out of your body. It lies in front of your rectum or back passage (as well as the womb and vagina in women) and increases in size, rather like a balloon, as it fills up with urine.



Source: diagram copy EMIS and PiP 2006, as distributed on www.patient.co.uk

Useful sources of information

Incontact. Provides support and advice for people with bowel and bladder problems and has a network of local groups. Phone **0870 770 3246** or email info@incontact.org

The Continence Foundation offers advice and assistance over the phone from specially trained nurses. Phone the helpline on **0845 345 0165** Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 1pm, email continence-help@dial.pipex.com or visit www.continence-foundation.org.uk

Disabled Living Foundation advises on and provides equipment for older and disabled people to lead independent lives. Phone **0845 130 9177** or text phone **020 7432 8009**

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

If you want more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or want to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital. Phone **020 7188 3416** or email kic@gstt.nhs.uk www.kic.gstt.nhs.uk

We offer bladder retraining in our bladder and bowel clinics within the Trust. Anyone with an overactive bladder can attend these clinics.

Tips to help

You may find the following tips helpful when retraining your bladder:

- Do not rush to the toilet when you feel the need to pass urine. Sit still on a firm chair until the urge goes away and try to hold on as long as possible. If this is difficult for you, you can try to hold on for one minute and gradually increase this time, according to your ability.
- Practice pelvic floor exercises, which strengthen your 'holding power'. Please ask us for a copy of our leaflet on pelvic floor exercises.
- Do not get in the habit of going to the toilet 'just in case'.
- Try to distract your attention from your bladder by thinking of, or doing something else.
- Drink at least seven to eight cups of fluid a day. Do not reduce the amount of fluid you drink, as concentrated urine can irritate your bladder. This can make you more likely to develop a urinary tract infection (UTI) and need to pass urine more frequently. Reduce the amount of caffeine you drink, for example drink less tea and coffee, because caffeine can irritate the bladder and will make it harder for you to 'hold on'.

When your bladder is half full, it sends a message to your brain to make you aware that you will need to pass urine (urinate) soon. Your brain sends a message back, to 'hold on' while you find a toilet. As your bladder fills up, the pressure inside it increases, giving you the urge (strong desire) to go to the toilet and pass urine.

When you pass urine, the muscles of your bladder contract, squeezing the urine out and down your urethra, see diagram on page two. Your urethra is the tube that urine passes through before exiting the body. Two other muscles help to control the passage of urine out of your body: the sphincter muscles, which surround your urethra; and the pelvic floor muscles, which support your bladder and bowel (as well as the womb in women). Both sets of muscles help to prevent urine from leaking out from the bladder when you do not want it to. They relax to allow you to pass urine, but remain contracted for the rest of the time.

A normal bladder can hold between 400 and 600ml of urine. On average, people normally empty their bladder four to seven times per day. However, this can vary from person to person.

What is urge incontinence?

Urinary incontinence is where you are unable to control when you pass urine. There are a number of different types of urinary incontinence, but the two most common types are:

- Urge incontinence, where you have a sudden need to pass urine (referred to as urgency) and may leak some urine before you reach a toilet. This type of incontinence is sometimes called an **overactive bladder**.
- Stress incontinence, where you leak urine without having the urge to go to the toilet. This may happen when you make a sudden movement, such as sneeze or laugh or when you exercise. The treatment for this type of incontinence is explained in our leaflets on **pelvic floor exercises**.

The rest of this leaflet explains what urge incontinence is and how bladder retraining can help.

What causes urge incontinence?

Sometimes your bladder sends messages to your brain too early, before it is full. Your bladder overrides the 'hold on' message from your brain, causing your bladder to contract and release urine before you want it to. Because it does not fill up completely, you may need to go to the toilet more, referred to as **frequency**.

People can also get into the habit of going to the toilet and emptying their bladder well before it is full. This makes your need to pass urine worse, as your bladder gets used to holding less urine and becomes more sensitive and overactive.

An overactive bladder is more common as you grow older, due to changes in your bladder and pelvic floor muscles, other medical conditions such as diabetes (and the menopause in women). However, it is not a normal part of the ageing process and can occur in both men and women of all ages.

What is bladder retraining and how can it help?

Bladder retraining is a self-help process to restore your normal bladder pattern by:

- increasing the amount of urine your bladder can hold;
- reducing the number of visits you need to make to the toilet to pass urine; and
- giving you confidence that you are in control of your bladder.

The goal with bladder retraining is to cut down of the amount of times you pass urine to six to eight times in a 24 hour period. This is done by gradually increasing the length of time between your trips to the toilet to pass urine. This may be difficult at first, but will become easier as your bladder adjusts to holding more urine.