Freedom From an Overactive Bladder

— *What You Need to Know and How to Get Relief Now!*

First START Publishing

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Freedom From an Overactive Bladder

What You Need to Know and How to Get Relief Now

Do you find yourself running to the bathroom more often lately? Are you terrified that you'll involuntarily spring a leak whenever you laugh or sneeze? Have you lost track of the number of bladder infections you've had? If you've answered yes to any of these questions, this booklet is for you!

Bladder problems can cause any number of symptoms – from slightly painful to highly embarrassing. And they only seem to get worse with age. After the age of 40, men can begin to experience problems because growth of the prostate accelerates and pushes on the bladder. Childbirth, especially repeated deliveries, can distort or traumatize the pelvic floor and urethral anatomy in women. What's more, levels of estrogen in a woman's body decrease after menopause, causing significant changes to the urinary tract. These changes play a huge role in urinary stress incontinence.

If that weren't bad enough, older people have less mucous in the urethra, making the urinary tract more susceptible to infection. Fortunately there are steps you can take now to keep your bladder toned and functioning properly.

Bladder Basics

Your bladder is a hollow, muscular, balloon-shaped organ that lies in your pelvis behind the pelvic bone. Think of it as an elastic holding tank – it swells into a round shape when full and gets smaller when empty. If your bladder is in top form, it can hold about two cups of urine for up to five hours.

The bladder's main function is to store and release urine. Nerves in the bladder tell you when it is time to urinate. As the bladder first fills with urine, you may notice a feeling that you need to go to the bathroom. The sensation to urinate becomes stronger as the bladder continues to fill and reaches its limit. At that point, nerves from the bladder send a message to the brain that the bladder is full, and your

urge to empty your bladder intensifies. When you urinate, the brain signals the bladder muscles to tighten, squeezing urine out of the bladder.

Of course, it's much more complicated than that, involving muscles called sphincter and detrusor. But, in a nutshell, the bladder is a high volume, low pressure system. Even when the bladder is full, the elasticity of the bladder allows room for additional fluid without causing high pressure within the bladder itself.

When You Have To Go – Now!

Bladder sensation can change with age. Instead of the normal sensation when the bladder is about half full, many older adults first feel the need to urinate at or near bladder capacity. For an active person, it can be a considerable inconvenience to locate toilet facilities immediately. To an immobile older adult or an individual with an unstable bladder or painful arthritis, this lack of time between feeling like you need to urinate and the actual release of urine can result in urinary incontinence.

Another factor that influences normal voiding function in women is the angle between the bladder and urethra, which is normally 90 to 100 degrees. After menopause, some women lose this angle, resulting in stress incontinence.

Other urinary tract changes that come with age include diminished capacity in the bladder, delayed desire to urinate, more residual urine left in the bladder, uncontrolled bladder contractions and the majority of urine production occurring while you sleep. These changes can make you more vulnerable to incontinence and more prone to bladder infection.

Bladder Infections

The urinary tract is supposed to be a one-way system, but sometimes the bladder serves as a gateway for bacteria to enter the body. The result is a bladder infection (also called a urinary tract infection or UTI). Because the path from bladder to exit is shorter in women than in men, women are 20 times more likely to contract a bladder infection. In fact, one out of five women can expect to have at least one infection in her lifetime. The notoriously long lines in women's restrooms are frequently blamed since "holding it" can distort and weaken the bladder, inviting infection. Tight pants, synthetic underwear, pantihose, vaginal deodorants and even deodorant soaps

can also encourage infection.

Two early signs of bladder infection are cloudy urine and a burning sensation when you urinate. You may also experience pain or a sense of heaviness in the bladder, especially when it is full or has just been emptied. As the infection progresses, false alarms from irritated nerves can send you running to the bathroom unnecessarily.

You can protect yourself from bladder infections with a berry normally reserved for the holidays. The cranberry has been used to prevent urinary problems since the mid-1800s because of its antiseptic properties and its ability to make urine more acidic. But, according to researchers at the Weizmann Institute of Science and Tel Aviv University in Israel, cranberries also contain compounds that keep bacteria from attaching to the bladder's wall and so prevent infections from taking hold.

One study was conducted at the Finnish Student Health Services at Oulu University with 150 women with persistent UTIs. Fifty drank cranberry juice daily for six months. Another 50 drank a probiotic preparation, while the final 50 women were given no treatment at all. After six months, only eight women taking the cranberry juice experienced a bladder infection, compared with 19 of those taking probiotics and 18 not taking anything.

The recommended dose is three to six ounces of cranberry juice per day, but most commercial juices are laden with sugar. And unsweetened varieties can be quite tart. You can get the same benefit by taking cranberry extract in supplement form. The recommend dose is 500 mg. of a standardized cranberry extract taken three to four times a day.

An active bladder infection may respond to the herb uva ursi. This groundcover from the southwestern United States contains a powerful antiseptic that is activated when it reaches the urinary tract. Once there, it kills bacteria, removes infectious material, reduces inflammation and even strengthens the urinary tract lining.

Two studies evaluated the antibacterial power of the urine in people who were taking uva ursi and found activity against most major bacteria that infect the urinary tract. Another double-blind trial followed 57 women for one year. Half were given a standardized dose of uva ursi while the others received a placebo. Over the course of the study, none of the women on uva ursi developed a bladder infection, whereas five of the untreated women did.

Buchu is another herb used to treat inflammation, as well as kidney and bladder infections. It is also a soothing diuretic and stomach tonic. When taking buchu, you should increase your consumption of foods rich in potassium, such as bananas, various dark green vegetables, whole grains and fish.

Yet another bladder friendly herb is Butcher's Broom, which enhances bladder health by boosting circulation and by acting as a diuretic and anti-inflammatory. Finally, white oak bark is a powerful astringent that has been used for centuries to treat bladder infections because of its diuretic, antioxidant and antiseptic properties which help flush impurities out of the body.

Urinary incontinence

If it feels like you plan your life around the proximity of the nearest bathroom, you're not alone. An estimated one in six adults suffer from an overactive bladder. Common symptoms include a sudden, uncontrollable urge to go, needing to go more than eight times a day, waking up twice or more at night to urinate, and leakage. And it just gets worse with age. For many women, symptoms appear in their 40s. If a woman doesn't seek treatment, the condition can impact her quality of life, leading to depression and anxiety, fear of sexual intimacy, decreased work productivity, avoidance of travel, a greater risk of nighttime falls and urinary tract infections.

An uncontrollable leakage of urine from the bladder results when a person loses voluntary control of the urinary sphincter muscles. One common form of urinary incontinence is known as stress incontinence. It often occurs while laughing, coughing or sneezing and, as the name suggest, when a person is faced with a stressful or dangerous situation.

Another form of urinary incontinence is known as urge incontinence, which can affect a person quite suddenly and comes on because of an overwhelming urge to urinate, resulting in spontaneous urination wherever the person happens to be at the time. Overflow incontinence occurs when the urge to urinate has been suppressed for too long. Eventually urine leaks out involuntarily.

Obesity can cause urinary incontinence because it puts an extra strain on the bladder. Chronic constipation can weaken the bladder and also cause incontinence.

Another likely reason for the development of urinary incontinence in some individuals is the use of certain medications which can affect the urinary system directly or indirectly. In addition to this, men with prostate problems are more susceptible to overflow incontinence.

Diet and Supplements

Often people with urinary incontinence want to reduce the amount of liquid they drink because they want to decrease the number of accidents and trips to the bathroom. But reducing fluid intake can cause more problems then it solves. A better option is to choose your liquids wisely.

Adults should drink six to eight cups of fluid each day. Limiting these fluids will not eliminate your incontinence. In fact, it can lead to constipation that can actually increase your risk of stress incontinence. Cutting back on fluids can also cause dehydration. Your body will produce less urine, but the urine will be very concentrated with a dark color and a strong odor. This can irritate the bladder and support the growth of bacteria that may cause bladder infections and further aggravate your incontinence.

Avoid foods and drinks that irritate your bladder or increase the amount of urine your body produces. Caffeine, which is found in drinks such as coffee and colas and foods like chocolate, is a diuretic and a bladder irritant. Consuming too much caffeine will make you urinate frequently. Spicy and tomato-based foods can also irritate the bladder.

Alcoholic beverages could be bad news as well since it has a direct effect on the bladder and acts like a diuretic. Alcohol interferes with the neurological signals from the brain to the bladder – telling it when to go, when to hold urine and so on. If you have a few cocktails, there is less control over that signaling and you are more likely to have an accident.

Dietary supplements can also play an important role in bladder health. Weakened sphincter muscles can be strengthened with supplemental magnesium and vitamin E. These nutrients can also help improve nerve transmissions, especially when you add calcium to the equation. If tension is contributing to stress incontinence, a vitamin B complex can boost your ability to handle stressful situations and are required for the proper functioning of the nerves involved in voiding.

Usual dosage

Vitamin B complex, 100 mg a day.

Vitamin E, 400 IU a day.

Magnesium, 250 mg two times a day.

Calcium, 1,000 mg a day.

The deterioration of the urinary mucus membranes can be also restored through the use of horsetail, an herb available in either supplement form or as a tea. This herb is also effective in strengthening the connective tissue in the body and can restore the functioning of the urinary system.

Weakened muscles can also be treated with topical compresses made from a hayflower infusion which is applied directly to the lower abdominal area. Hayflower (*Flores graminis*) is the collective name given to pollen- rich flowers found amongst growing hay.

Other methods such as taking regular hot sitz-baths can also prove beneficial, especially when the bath contains herbs such as horsetail, oat straw and chamomile. These herbal sitz baths stimulate circulation within the urinary tract and can be taken every evening during the treatment period to promote a healthy bladder. Typically the sitz-bath must contain about three to five quarts of herbal infusion to be effective.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is an extremely safe form of holistic medicine that uses natural, non-toxic remedies to stimulate the body's own inherent healing capacity. Based on the law of similars, substances that can cause symptoms in a healthy person are used to cure similar symptoms in a person who is ill. It has long been used to treat incontinence and is especially effective for stress incontinence.

Homeopathic remedies are also often helpful during bladder infections, relieving discomfort and encouraging quick recovery. Symptoms that respond well to homeopathy include a frequent urge to urinate with burning or stinging sensations, and sometimes aching in the bladder area. Offensive-smelling, cloudy, or discolored urine may be passed. Very painful or long-lasting urinary tract infections – especially when accompanied by fever, pain in the kidney region, or other serious symptoms – should be treated by a doctor.

Here are some of the most common remedies used to treat urinary incontinence and bladder infection:

Apis mellifica: This remedy is indicated when the person frequently needs to urinate, but only small quantities are passed. Stinging and burning sensations are felt (especially with the last few drops) and the person may also experience soreness in the abdomen. Heat and touch

make the symptoms worse, and a cool bath and open air bring relief. A lack of thirst is another indication that *Apis* may be needed.

Arnica Montana: Although normally used to relieve bruising after an injury, arnica has also been used successfully to relieve the involuntary dribbling of urine and enhance the muscular activity of the bladder.

Allium Cepa: A strong antimicrobial, this homeopathic remedy is indicated for the sensation of weakness in the bladder and urethra. It also stimulates the bladder and liver. Allium cepa is useful for the relief of burning and painful urination associated with common bladder irritation, especially when symptoms are worse in a warm room and better in fresh, open air.

Belladonna: This remedy may be beneficial if the urge to urinate is frequent and intense, and the bladder feels very sensitive. A cramping or writhing sensation may be felt in the bladder area and the urine is highly-colored. This remedy is sometimes helpful if a person passes small amounts of blood and no serious cause can be found on medical examination.

Cantharis: Strong urging to urinate – with cutting pains that are felt before the urine passes, as well as during and after – may indicate a need for this remedy. Only several drops of urine pass at a time with a scalding sensation. The person may have a constant urge to urinate and feel as if the bladder has not been emptied. Effective when other physical actions such as coughing, laughing, sneezing, becoming excited or even walking result in a bout of incontinence.

Equisetum: Good for dull but distressing pain and a feeling of fullness in the bladder, even after urinating. Also indicated when discomfort is more intense after urinating and improving as the bladder becomes fuller. Tendency to wake several times a night because of an urgent need to urinate.

Rhus Aromatica: Remedy for anxiety, fear, panic and desperation due to incontinence. Rhus also has a direct affect on the bladder and is used for bedwetting in the young and the old. Useful for bladder weakness, frequent night-time urination, inability to fill the bladder before needing relief, dribbling and lack of urine retention.

Homeopathy Dosage Directions

Select the remedy that most closely matches your symptoms. In

conditions where self-treatment is appropriate, a lower potency (6X, 6C, 12X, 12C, 30X, or 30C) should be used.

Many homeopathic physicians suggest that remedies be used as follows: Take one dose and wait for a response. If improvement is seen, continue to wait and let the remedy work. If improvement lags significantly or has clearly stopped, another dose may be taken. The frequency of dosage varies with the condition and the individual. Sometimes a dose may be required several times an hour; other times a dose may be indicated several times a day; and in some situations, one dose per day (or less) can be sufficient.

If no response is seen within a reasonable amount of time, select a different remedy.

Exercising Bladder Control

Kegal exercises can strengthen the muscles that regulate bladder control. Developed by Dr. Arnold Kegel in 1948 as a way to treat women experiencing urinary incontinence following childbirth, these exercises are now one of the primary methods used to improve pelvic muscle tone. Some women perform Kegel exercises before, during and after pregnancy to assist with delivery and help prevent problems with incontinence following childbirth. But anyone suffering from incontinence can benefit from Kegels. In fact, the National Institutes of Health reports that Kegel exercises can improve urinary incontinence by 50 to 80 percent.

But for Kegel exercises to be successful, you must use proper technique and adhere to a regular exercise program. The following steps should be taken:

Identify the *pelvic floor muscles* (the series of muscles that form a sling or hammock across the opening of the pelvis). This can be done in several ways. One way is to sit on the toilet and begin urinating. Then, stop the flow of urine by contracting the pelvic floor muscles. It is important not to contract the buttocks, abdomen or thigh muscles. This action should be repeated until you become familiar with the sensation of contracting the correct muscles. Another way is to insert a finger into the vagina (in women) or *rectum* (in men) and tighten the pelvic floor muscles, as if holding back the flow of urine. The abdominal and thigh muscles should stay relaxed. While contracted, the muscles can be identified by touch.

Contract the pelvic floor muscles for 10 seconds (a count of 10).

Patients who cannot hold the contraction for 10 seconds should hold it for as long as possible.

Relax the muscles for 10 seconds (a count of 10). Good relaxation is as important as a good contraction.

Repeat the exercise eight to 12 times, three times a day (usually morning, afternoon and evening). Exercises should be performed three to four times a week for at least 15 to 20 weeks.

Exercises can be performed anywhere, at any time. Most people prefer to do them while lying down or sitting in a chair and it's not unusual to see improvement after just four to six weeks – although it could take as long as three months.

Alternative Treatments

Working hand in hand with Kegel exercises, bio-feedback helps you become more aware of signals from your body. This may help you regain control over the muscles in your bladder and urethra.

Timed voiding and bladder training also can help you control your bladder. In timed voiding, you keep a chart of urination and leaking to determine the pattern. Once you learn that, you can plan to empty your bladder before you might leak. When combined with biofeedback and pelvic muscle exercises, these methods may help you control urge and overflow incontinence.

Acupuncture can also help you gain control, especially if you experience urge incontinence. In one small study, Swedish researchers treated 15 women with acupuncture for their incontinence. After 12 treatments, the participants reported improvement in leakage, night-time urination and urge intensity. Better yet, relief lasted for three months after the treatments had stopped.

Though these alternative therapies can effectively relieve bladder control problems, they can't eradicate these problems. But scientists have reported on a new technique that may one day cure incontinence, by using the patients own stem cells to repair damaged urethral muscles.

Out of 186 men and women the researchers treated with this procedure, 156 were reportedly cured of incontinence and no longer had to wear pads. The patients reported that their quality of life

improved dramatically with the procedure.

Of course you can't wait for science – you need relief now! Untreated incontinence could cause skin infections, urinary tract infections, pressure sores, trouble sleeping, reduced sexual activity and depression. But, by utilizing the resources in this booklet and taking an active role in your treatment, you can conquer chronic bladder problems and rediscover the freedom of healthy bladder control.

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