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Overactive Bladder

What Is Overactive Bladder?

Overactive bladder, also known as urge incontinence, is a condition characterized by unusually frequent or intense urges to urinate. Under normal conditions, the muscles in the bladder contract when the bladder is over one-third full. However, an overactive bladder feels urinary urgency even when the bladder may only contain a small amount of urine.

Overactive bladder is a significant public-health problem, affecting one in 11 adults in the United States. If you have overactive bladder or urge incontinence, you may feel embarrassed, isolate yourself, or limit your work and social life. People who have overactive bladder are at also heightened risk of depression and sleep disturbances. It is important to talk with your doctor even if you initially feel embarrassed: overactive bladder or urge incontinence can signal an underlying medical problem. However, effective treatments are available, and seeing your doctor for symptoms of overactive bladder often results in restored comfort and control.

What Causes Overactive Bladder?

Overactive bladder can result from one or more of the following causes:

- ❖ Urinary tract infections
- ❖ Medications that have diuretic side effects
- ❖ Beverages or medicines that contain caffeine
- ❖ Neurological disease such as multiple sclerosis or Parkinson's disease
- ❖ Tumors in the bladder

- ❖ Nerve damage to the abdominal area or pelvis caused by trauma or prior surgery
- ❖ Bladder outlet obstructions
- ❖ Spina bifida (a congenital condition affecting the spinal cord)
- ❖ Bladder stones
- ❖ High urine production resulting from a condition such as poor kidney function or diabetes
- ❖ Inflammation of the prostate or prostate cancer in men

Who Is at Risk of Overactive Bladder?

Overactive bladder can affect people of any age; however, it is more common in older people. You are also at heightened risk if you take a prescription medicine that has diuretic effects or if you have had injuries or past surgeries in the abdominal or pelvic areas. You may also be at increased risk if you have a disease that affects the nervous system.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

The following symptoms show that you may have an overactive bladder:

- ❖ Frequent urination, usually eight or more times in 24 hours
- ❖ Awakening two or more times in the night to urinate (nocturia)
- ❖ A perceived urgent need to urinate
- ❖ Urge incontinence (a strong need to urinate followed by leaking or involuntary and incomplete voiding)

How Is an Overactive Bladder Diagnosed?

If you consult your doctor for symptoms that suggest overactive bladder, he or she will conduct a comprehensive physical exam that includes nerve testing (neurological examination). Through discussion with you and a review of your medical records, your doctor will also assemble the key facts of your medical history. If indicated, he or she may order the following imaging tests:

- ❖ Cystoscopy: imaging that can reveal the inside of bladder and urethra.

- ❖ Cystometrogram: measures the amount of fluid in the bladder when you first feel the need to urinate
- ❖ Electromyogram (EMG): checks the health of the muscles and nerves that control the bladder

Tests are also available to measure parameters of urinary flow. Your doctor may also order one of these metrics tests:

- ❖ Pressure-flow cystometry: Measures the pressure and volume of fluid in the bladder during its filling, storage, and voiding phases
- ❖ Urine flow test: Measures the volume of urine released from the body, the speed with which it is excreted, and the time required
- ❖ Postvoid residual urine measurement: Measures the volume of urine that remains in the bladder after urination
- ❖ Urinalysis: Profiles the physical, chemical, and microscopic examination of urine

What Are Common Treatments?

Treatments reflect the diagnosed source of the problem, its severity, and other factors such as your overall general health. As an initial approach your doctor may recommend lifestyle modifications including the following practices:

- ❖ Avoid consuming alcohol
- ❖ Follow a high-fiber diet
- ❖ Maintain a habit of regular exercise
- ❖ Avoid the consumption of caffeine
- ❖ Empty the bladder at scheduled times using methods such as prompted voiding

Your doctor may also recommend the following behavioral therapies to help you regain control of your bladder:

- ❖ Kegel exercises: can improve or prevent urinary incontinence by exercising and strengthening pelvic muscles
- ❖ Biofeedback: helps people gain awareness and control of their pelvic muscles (used in conjunction with Kegel exercises)

- ❖ Vaginal weight training: exercises where your vagina holds small weights, tightening the muscles around them, for about 15 minutes at a time, twice daily, for four to six weeks
- ❖ Bladder training: teaches people to resist the urge to void and to gradually extend the intervals between voiding

In severe cases your doctor may recommend pelvic-floor stimulation and pelvic muscle rehabilitation.

In addition, your doctor may prescribe one or more of the following medications to improve regional muscle tone or to control any spasmodic movements that can contribute to overactive bladder syndrome:

- ❖ Tolterodine
- ❖ Solifenacin
- ❖ Trospium
- ❖ Oxybutynin

In cases of severe overactive bladder that do not improve through other treatments, surgery may be an option. One surgical strategy focuses on enlarging the bladder to increase its capacity (bladder augmentation surgery).

Can Overactive Bladder Be Prevented?

You can help to protect yourself from overactive bladder by taking such precautions as these:

- ❖ Cease or greatly moderate your alcohol consumption
- ❖ Follow a high-fiber diet
- ❖ Maintain a habit of regular exercise
- ❖ Avoid or reduce your the consumption of caffeine
- ❖ Intentionally empty the bladder at scheduled times

Should I Call My Doctor?

Seek emergency medical help if you have any of the following symptoms:

- ❖ Fever, back or side pain, vomiting, or shaking with chills
- ❖ Suddenly increased thirst or appetite, fatigue, or sudden weight loss
- ❖ Bloody urine
- ❖ A sudden loss of urinary (or bowel) control (can indicate an imminent stroke)

Make an appointment to see your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- ❖ Excessive, unexplained urinary frequency
- ❖ Urinary urgency
- ❖ Incontinence
- ❖ Cloudy urine
- ❖ Discharge from your penis or vagina

Also, consult your doctor if you have urinary symptoms that cause you to alter your lifestyle.

For More Information

For more information, refer to the following medical resources:

[http://www.urologyhealth.org/urologic-conditions/overactive-bladder-\(oab\)](http://www.urologyhealth.org/urologic-conditions/overactive-bladder-(oab))

<http://www.urologyhealth.org/urology/index.cfm?article=9>

<http://www.urologyhealth.org/educational-materials/overactive-bladder-patient-guide>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/urinaryincontinence.html>

The content in this document is neither intended nor recommended as a substitute for seeking professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. It is recommended that you seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare professional regarding any medical questions related to the topics contained within this document, your health or conditions.