

Regaining Control of Your Bladder

This leaflet explains more about getting back control of your bladder. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

How does the bladder work?

Urine is collected and stored in the bladder. The bladder relaxes during filling and contracts when emptying. As it fills, a message is sent to the brain which in turn sends a message back to the bladder to either hold the liquid or empty it. The bladder can hold between 450 to 600ml of urine and it's normal to pass urine between five and eight times in 24 hours.

Your pelvic floor muscles provide control of your bladder when they contract.

What is incontinence?

If any part of your bladder or the system around it isn't working properly you may accidentally leak some urine. This is what we call incontinence.

Are there different types of incontinence?

There are three main kinds of incontinence:

Stress incontinence caused by a physical stress on your bladder which makes you leak. This often happens when you cough, sneeze or exercise and one of the causes is poor control of your pelvic floor muscles which may also be weak.

Urge incontinence is when you have a sudden need to go to the toilet straight away and leak if you do not make it to the toilet in time. This may happen due to having an overactive bladder, an irritation inside your bladder or bad toilet habits. You may have the desire to go to the toilet many times in the day (frequency) or during the night (nocturia).

Mixed incontinence is a combination of stress and urge incontinence.

What treatments are available?

A physiotherapist can work with you to help with your incontinence.

You will have an initial appointment with a specialist physiotherapist who will ask many questions about your symptoms, lifestyle, previous surgery and any other existing medical problems.

After this you can discuss the best treatment for you. This could include exercise, techniques to control urgency and changes to your diet or fluids.

There is also medication which your doctor can prescribe which may help reduce your bladder symptoms. This can be used together with physiotherapy.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

Keep a note of the following (over three days) to help you and your physiotherapist understand how your bladder is working and how much urine it can hold when it works as it should:

- how much you drink
- the amount of urine you pass
- the number of times you pass urine and have a leak.

If you notice you are going to the toilet more often than normal, you may find it helpful to try the following:

Bladder retraining can help you to sometimes ignore the need to pass urine. This should lead to you feeling this need less often and your bladder then being able to hold more urine and becoming less active. This should give you more confidence keeping your bladder under control.

Bladder retraining takes time and determination – stick with it for at least six weeks to make a difference.

Tips for holding on:

- When you get the urge to pass urine, try to hold on for just a minute or two to start with, gradually increasing to half an hour and then an hour.
- Keep calm and relaxed.
- Sit on a hard seat or over the arm of a chair.
- Tighten your pelvic floor muscles to help relax your bladder and stop the urge.
- Cross your legs.
- Distract yourself by something such as making a list, tidying the house or thinking about what to have for dinner.
- Count to 60 before you go to the toilet.
- Never go to the toilet just in case.
- Sit still for 10 to 20 seconds before calmly walking to the toilet.

Do not hover over the toilet when passing urine. Instead, make sure you are sitting well supported and relaxed so that you can empty your bladder properly.

Pelvic floor muscle exercises will help strengthen your muscles giving you more control over your bladder and bowels. See our pelvic floor leaflet or discuss this with your physiotherapist to make sure you are doing the exercises correctly.

Try to keep up healthy drinking and eating habits and aim to drink about 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid a day. Spread your drinks out evenly over the day and don't restrict your fluid intake as this may make your symptoms worse. Gradually reduce the amount of caffeine, fizzy, acidic and alcoholic drinks you have, as these can all irritate your bladder and increase its activity.

Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and avoid straining to empty your bowels as this may stretch and weaken your supportive pelvic floor muscles. Being overweight can also put extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about regaining control of your bladder, please contact us on 020 8725 1333.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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