

Regaining control of your bladder

This leaflet explains about getting back control of your bladder. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or physiotherapist 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 or approximately one pint of urine. It is normal to pass urine between five and eight times in 24 hours.

Your pelvic floor muscles also help to support and control your bladder.

What is incontinence?

If any part of your bladder, or the system around it, isn't working properly then 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 is caused by a physical stress on your bladder which makes you leak. This often happens when you cough, sneeze or exercise. Weakness or poor control of your pelvic floor muscles may contribute to these symptoms.

Urge incontinence is when you have a sudden need to go to the toilet which may be followed by a 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 exercises, changes to your diet or fluids or techniques to control the bladder urgency. There is also **medication** which your doctor can prescribe which may help reduce your bladder symptoms. This can be used together with physiotherapy.

If you feel that your symptoms could be linked to **hormonal or menopausal changes**, then speak with your GP or specialist. In these cases, the use of vaginal hormone treatments can help reduce these symptoms.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

For all types of incontinence, it is important to maintain good bladder and bowel habits such as:

- **Staying hydrated** by aiming 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.

- **Avoid irritants.** Try to gradually reduce bladder irritants such as caffeine, fizzy drinks, acidic food and drinks and alcoholic drinks, as these can all irritate your bladder and increase its activity.
- **Maintain healthy eating habits** by eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables to reduce constipation. Avoid straining to empty your bowels as this may stretch and weaken your pelvic floor muscles. Being overweight can also put extra strain on your pelvic floor muscles.

For specific types of incontinence, try these additional suggestions below:

Stress incontinence:

- **Pelvic floor muscle exercises** will help strengthen your muscles, giving you more control over your bladder and bowels (see the link / QR code below for our video on how to complete these exercises).
- **The ‘Knack’** is when you squeeze your pelvic floor muscles just before any effort to prevent a leak e.g. coughing, sneezing, or lifting something heavy.

Urge incontinence:

- **Keep a bladder diary** – to help you and your physiotherapist understand how your bladder is working, make a note of the following over a two to three day period (see the link / QR code below for an example diary on our website):
 - how much you drink
 - the amount of urine you pass
 - how often you pass urine or have a leak.

- **Bladder retraining** can help you to hold onto larger volumes of urine for longer, with less urgency or leakage. This should help you feel that you are in control of your bladder, rather than the bladder controlling you. Bladder retraining can take six to eight weeks to make a difference, so be determined and stick with it (see the link / QR code below for our video on bladder retraining). Here are our tips:
 - When you get the urge to pass urine, try and hold on for just a minute or two to start with and gradually increase the time for which you hold on
 - Avoid going to the toilet just in case
 - Stay calm and relaxed - you can try breathing techniques to help with this
 - Squeeze and hold your pelvic floor muscles for 10 seconds
 - Distract yourself or keep yourself busy, to try and take your mind off the bladder, e.g. count back from 100 in 7s.

Sit on a hard seat, cross your legs, curl your toes, or stand on tip-toes,

Useful sources of information

Pelvic health physiotherapy resource page:



Also accessible via

[Patient Resources - St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your symptoms, please speak to your GP or midwife to get a referral to pelvic health physiotherapy.

Our website:

[Pelvic Health Physiotherapy - St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust \(stgeorges.nhs.uk\)](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)

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

Was this information helpful? Yes / No

Please let us know, contact

patient.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk and include the leaflet title.

Thank you.

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

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

NHS UK

The NHS 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 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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