How to Retrain Your Bladder for OAB

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Teach Your Bladder New Habits

Overactive bladder can be frustrating, messy and potentially embarrassing. It can also be expensive — it was estimated that in 2007, the average person suffering from overactive bladder (OAB) spent $1,925 annually ($1,433 in direct medical costs, $66 in direct nonmedical and $426 in indirect costs).

Applying this to the estimated 34 million OAB sufferers in the US, this totals an astounding $65.9 billion dollars annually.

What if there was potentially a way you could decrease your costs and you could do this at home?

Bladder retraining is a technique that can be used to help you gain control over your bladder. Using this technique, you'll work on building the muscles of the bladder so that you can hold the urine for longer periods of time.

You may not be accident-free forever but you'll probably feel a whole lot better once you've learned this technique!

Who Can Benefit From Bladder Retraining?

A variety of people can benefit from bladder retraining! Anyone who suffers with any type of urinary incontinence can benefit from this technique.

- Children who are bed-wetting.
- Overflow incontinence (the inability to completely empty the bladder, leading to urine leakage).
- Stress incontinence (sudden pressure on the bladder that can cause leakage of urine; this may be caused by coughing, sneezing, or laughing).
- Urge incontinence (a sudden urge to go to the bathroom, even when the bladder isn't full; also known as OAB).
- Mixed incontinence (a mixture of stress and urge incontinence).

Incontinence is most typical in women after childbirth and in menopause, although it can happen in either gender and at any age.

Performing the Technique

Learning bladder retraining is a systematic process. It takes time and practice to learn.

Remember that you are training the muscles of the bladder, much as you train he muscles of any other part of the body and they take time to respond.

- **Buy a notebook and keep a diary.** Your diary should include all bladder activity, such as the time of your voids and any leakage that occurs.
- **Urinate first thing in the morning.** Attempt to empty the bladder completely.
- **With your healthcare provider, set specific times for urinating.** Go to the bathroom and urinate at those specific times. Even if you do not feel the urge to urinate, sit down and attempt to urinate. When you urinate, attempt to empty the bladder completely. Do not set times for the evening hours unless advised by your provider; only get up to urinate if you wake up to do so. If you find that during the day you have to urinate in between the scheduled times, attempt to wait. However, if this is not possible, use the bathroom but get back on schedule with the next scheduled bathroom break.
- **When you have successfully mastered the goal of the schedule as set by your provider, increase the times between the bathroom breaks by 15 minutes.** Attempt to increase the intervals every week or so. Once you have reached intervals of three to four hours, you have found success.
- **Perform pelvic muscle exercises (also known as Kegel exercises) daily.** This will help with bladder retraining.

Success!

A successful bladder retraining program takes anywhere from six to 12 weeks. However, everyone is different — some people can retrain their bladders more quickly and others less so.

You may have good days and you have bad days. You also may find that although you have found success with the bladder retraining technique, you still have incontinence every now and again — this does not mean that you failed. Look at the big picture and remember where you started!