Relaxation Therapy for Overactive Bladder

by ERIC PATTERSON

From Tension to Tranquility

Overactive bladder (OAB) feeds stress, and this is not surprising to anyone with the medical condition. OAB limits your activities because the fear of embarrassment keeps you close to home and close to your safety zone. Like only chronic conditions, physical health symptoms of OAB exacerbate the mental health symptoms. In turn, the stress and anxiety trigger OAB and make symptoms worse.

There is good news for OAB sufferers, though. Studies are showing that engaging in relaxation therapy can calm the body and the mind. When you find peace, you will experience fewer spasms of the bladder and increased time between incidents of incontinence. If you can create some sense of control over your mind, your body will follow. If your body follows, your bladder will receive the message.

Control your OAB

Relaxation therapy is a tool that therapists use daily to help people manage their anxiety. This means that even if OAB symptoms do not improve, your mental health will. Here's how:

- **Deep breathing** – Deep breathing is the first relaxation technique to learn. It is the simplest and most basic skill. Many other techniques use deep breathing skills. Assume a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. Put your right hand on your stomach and your left handle on your chest. As you breathe in, feel your right hand moving while your left remains still. The goal is to fill your lungs by using your diaphragm to suck in air. Most people move their shoulders when breathing deeply, but this only partially fills the lungs. Work to extend the seconds of inhaling and exhaling. Five seconds in and 7 seconds out is a great goal, but three in and five out might be your starting point. Deep breathing provides access to extra oxygen, which allows your heart to slow down. This decreases bladder spasms. Repeat as needed.
- **Autogenic training** – Autogenics is a type of self-hypnosis where you repeat a series of phrases to yourself. A quick online search will yield great scripts to use as a guide. Autogenics allows for modification and manipulation to obtain your desired effect. Appropriate phrases for OAB include: My bladder is calm, my body sends me needed signals, and my brain and my bladder communicate well. These messages work to retrain your thinking to be more desirable while training your body to be more relaxed. Self-hypnosis can help the brain reconnect with the spinal cord and bladder, making OAB more manageable.
- **Guided imagery** – Guided imagery involves listening to a read script or reading a script yourself. They often involve thinking about yourself on a tropical island or a relaxing destination from your past. These serve as a distraction from your stressors and allow your mind and body to become refreshed. Countless examples can be found online of both written and audio scripts. Find one or many that work for you. A study found that people who completed a 15-minute visualization exercise twice daily reduced their incontinence episodes drastically.

Soothing Solutions

OAB has likely dramatically changed your life, but stand by no longer. Learning, practicing and perfecting relaxation therapy will empower you to triumph over your overactive bladder. Get started and get living.