A patient guide to a Healthy Bladder

About 6 million people of all ages in Britain have problems with their bladder. In many cases these problems can be improved or even cured.

How does a healthy bladder work?

Urine is a waste product produced by the kidneys and collected / stored in the bladder.

The bladder is a muscular bag which should stay calm and relaxed as it stretches to store urine. It should be able to hold around 500ml (almost one pint).

When your bladder is full it contracts and empties the urine out**.** It is normal to empty your bladder 6-8 times a day and just once during overnight

Pelvic Floor Muscles support and control the bladder. By activating these muscles correctly you may be able to prevent leaks and manage the sensation of urgency often associated with the need to pass urine

What can go wrong with your bladder?

Stress Incontinence…. This is a common condition in women affecting 1 in 4 at some stage in their lives. It's nothing to do with being 'stressed' or anxious. It is often due to a lack of support for the bladder and can occur when pelvic floor muscles are weak.

Urine may leak out of the bladder during activities such as coughing or sneezing or any movement that increases downward pressure on the bladder. Stress incontinence is rare in men but can happen after prostate surgery.

Overactive Bladder…There are many different symptoms that you can experience if you have this condition. You may have some or all of the following;

- Commonly people describe a sudden strong need to pass urine that's very difficult to put off.
- It may be that you are unable to reach the toilet without leaking.
- Having to pass urine frequently during the day
- Waking often during the night with the need to pass urine.

Certain things can trigger off these symptoms such as;

Cold weather

Sound of running water

Putting your key in the door

Improve your bladder function

Drink about 6-8 mugs (2000mls) of fluid each day. If you do not drink enough, urine becomes stronger and can make the problems associated with an overactive bladder worse.

Avoid caffeine as it can irritate the bladder so avoid drinks such as tea, coffee, coke and red bull. There are plenty of decaffeinated tea and coffee products available which make a healthy alternative.

Avoid alcohol as it often makes bladder symptoms more noticeable.

Stop smoking because nicotine irritates the bladder lining. Many smokers have a cough and notice frequent leaks when coughing

Avoid constipation as it can affect the way your bladder works. Try to drink as advised and eat a well-balanced diet including wholemeal bread, cereals, fruit, vegetables and pulses. Regular exercise is good for your general health and helps prevent constipation

Consider weight reduction Being overweight will put strain on your pelvic floor and make you leak more. Weight loss can considerably improve your symptoms.

Bladder Retraining

This is an effective way of reducing the symptoms of an overactive bladder and involves;

Keep a bladder diary for 5 days

This will give helpful information about bladder function and completing the diary will enable you to work with the continence nurse or physiotherapist to assess your fluid intake and bladder emptying pattern. Measuring the amount of urine you pass each time will demonstrate your bladder capacity.

Depending on your bladder-emptying pattern

You will be asked to try and delay going to the toilet when you feel the urge to pass urine. The specific 'hold on' times will be agreed during your consultation.

Use the following techniques to try to hold on:

• Sit on a hard seat

• Rub the front of your thighs

• Relaxation techniques

• Tightening your pelvic floor muscles

• Take your mind off your bladder sensation (singing, reading etc)

Try and get out of the habit of emptying your bladder 'just in case' as this will make an overactive bladder worse.

Remember Retraining is not easy and it may take a few weeks before you notice any change. Be patient but be determined. Our aim is to stop your bladder ruling your life!