



Overactive bladder – your dos and don'ts!

As you have been referred to the clinic for an overactive bladder we have provided the following information to use as a reminder of what to do and what not to do to help relieve your symptoms.

DO ☺☺☺

- Drink plenty of clear fluids (water, fruit teas, “full sugar” squash/cordial). You should be drinking about 1.5-2 litres per day (2.5-3.5 pints). Your bladder needs to learn to fill up properly.
- Switch to decaffeinated tea and coffee and limit even this. Remember that hot chocolate also contains caffeine!
- Cut out all “diet” drinks – they contain artificial sweeteners (this also means anything saying “no added sugar”, “low calorie/low sugar” or “zero” on it).
- Cut out any added artificial sweeteners, e.g. Canderel, Splenda, Stevia.
- Cut out or cut right down on alcohol.
- Wear a pad in the early stages of bladder training – you will probably leak more!
- Cut out all “just in case” wees – this would include weeing because you’re about to go out, for example. The only just in case wee that is allowed is the one just before you get into bed.
- Accept that your bladder problems will get worse before they start to get better, especially if you haven’t been drinking enough in an attempt to manage it.
- Bring back your last drink of the day to at least 1.5 hours before bed, and empty your bladder before going to sleep. This should help to reduce the amount of times you wake up to wee during the night.
- Space your fluid intake out over the whole day, rather than trying to drink it all in the evening or after work. Try using a measured water bottle.
- Fill in your bladder chart, and keep it safe to bring to your follow up appointment. This will help us to tailor your individualised bladder training.
- Make sure you do your pelvic floor exercises three times per day minimum. If you do them less than this, there is a good chance that they will not work.
- Delay the urge to go. Use the distraction techniques we have talked about and which can also be found in the [‘Overactive bladder training’](#) leaflet.
- If you have been prescribed topical oestrogen cream for your vagina, remember to use it and also put some of the cream around your urethral opening (wee hole!) as well as inside your vagina.
- Carry something like a “she-wee” if you have to go on a long car journey. This will help reduce anxiety, which in turn helps to reduce symptoms.

Don't ☹️☹️☹️

- Don't drink "normal" tea or coffee – caffeine is a bladder irritant and will make your symptoms worse!
- Don't drink any squash/cordial that says "no added sugar", "low calorie", "low sugar" or "zero" on it – these contain artificial sweeteners which are another bladder irritant.
- Don't drink carbonated (fizzy) drinks – this is also a bladder irritant. The worst offenders are:
 - Diet cola (it's got caffeine, artificial sweeteners and it's fizzy!)
 - So-called "energy" drinks – same as diet cola! Get your energy from drinking and eating properly and good sleep hygiene!
 - Tonic water – unless it's "full sugar". The gin that goes with it is another thing to avoid anyway!
- Don't drink alcohol if you can avoid it – another bladder irritant.
- Don't drink just before bed. If you must take tablets literally just before bed, only swallow just enough water to swallow the tablets – no more. Even better, take them with your last drink of the day if you can.
- No drinking overnight. If you're thirsty, then you haven't drunk enough during the day – fix this! If you are continuously thirsty no matter how much you drink, see your GP. If your mouth is dry, for example due to sleeping with an open mouth, swill it out with water but then spit the water out into a bowl – do not swallow it!!
- Do not reduce your fluid intake in an attempt to reduce needing to go. This does the opposite of what you want it to do, as the bladder never learns to relax while filling, plus what's in there is concentrated which is yet another bladder irritant!
- Don't "give in" to your bladder. You need to be brave. Delaying the urge and waiting is part of training the bladder and helping it to realise it can relax and fill up, so you need to make sure you're doing it. Yes, sometimes you will leak anyway because your bladder will say no! This is why we ask you to wear a pad in the early stages. Training your pelvic floor muscles to be stronger will help you to reduce that urge.
- Don't assume that if you do your pelvic floor exercises "most of the time" (or only twice a day), that this will still be enough. I know it feels like we go on about this, but the research tells us they must be done three times per day minimum in order to be sure of building strength and endurance.

Above all, try not to panic! Anxiety makes both bladder and bowel issues worse. Having an overactive bladder impacts greatly on your quality of life, so together, we will help you improve your symptoms.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

J Churches, Specialist Physiotherapist, Pelvic Health & Maternity, December 2022

Reviewed: January 2025

Next review due: January 2027