



General information about fluid intake

Aim to drink about eight teacups of fluid each day (approx 1.5 litres). If you do not drink enough you will produce concentrated urine which may irritate your bladder and make your symptoms worse.

It is sensible to drink less if you are going on a long journey or outings but make sure you drink 1.5 litres in total during the day. If you have lots of problems with your bladder, then have your drinks when it is easier to get to a toilet.

Contact us

East Berkshire

Continence Advisory Service
Andrew's Annexe, St Mark's Hospital
St Mark's Road
Maidenhead
SL6 6DU

Telephone: 01753 638489
Email: continence@berkshire.nhs.uk

West Berkshire

Continence Advisory Service
Wokingham Community Hospital
41 Barkham Road
Wokingham
RG41 2RE

Telephone: 0118 949 5145 / 5146



www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

The Overactive Bladder

Information for service users



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The well-behaved bladder

Your bladder has to store enough urine (between 250 - 500mls) to allow you to do daily activities and have enough sleep. When your bladder is filling up, the bladder muscle is relaxed. When the bladder is becoming full it sends a signal to the brain. When we first feel the need to go to the toilet, we can usually hold on until it is convenient to go. When we decide to go to the toilet, the bladder muscles begin to contract. Adults usually empty their bladder every three to four hours during the day. At night it is normal to pass urine once. This usually increases over the age of 60 years and by the age of 90 years you may pass urine four times a night.

However, if you have an overactive bladder you may have some or all of the following symptoms:

- **Urgency:** you will suddenly need to go to the toilet immediately – and if you do not, your urine may leak
- **Frequency:** you will go to the toilet a lot, eight times or more, but only passing small amounts of urine
- **Urge Incontinence:** you will have the feeling of urgency and don't get to the toilet in time.

What can I do about it?

You can try something called bladder retraining. This is aimed at reducing the number of visits to the toilet each day and increasing the time between toilet visits to about three hours.

If you get up to the toilet more than once during the night:

- Try avoiding caffeine based drinks for five hours before bedtime as they can keep you awake
- Cutting down your total evening drinks may help
- Just take sips if you're thirsty during the night.



Why do frequency and urgency happen?

These symptoms happen when the bladder muscle starts to contract before we go to the toilet. This can happen if you get into the habit of going to the toilet

'just in case'. This means that the bladder only has to hold a small amount of urine, instead of waiting until the bladder is full.

Urgency and frequency can be affected by:

- Anxiety
- Constipation
- Infection
- Certain medicines
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- A disease of the nervous system e.g. Parkinson's
- Prostate enlargement in men

However, in many cases the cause is not known.

Caffeine

Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, cola and many painkiller tablets (prescribed and bought). You can become used to the effects of caffeine so may not notice those mentioned in this leaflet. A maximum of six cups per day is advised. You should avoid caffeine if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, kidney, liver or heart disease. When using decaffeinated drinks, ensure the caffeine has not been extracted by chemical methods.

Caffeine can affect your bladder by:

- Slightly increasing the amount of urine you produce
- Reducing the length and depth of your sleep, so indirectly increasing the number of times you might want to pass urine at night
- Increasing urinary urgency, frequency and getting up to the toilet at night (nocturia) if you have an overactive bladder
- Slightly reducing bladder outlet muscle tone which may mean you leak urine more.

It may be beneficial for all patients doing bladder retraining to try to reduce their caffeine intake to less than 100mg per day (approximately two cups of tea or coffee).

Cutting down on caffeine

If you stop taking caffeine do it gradually over two weeks to avoid the following withdrawal symptoms:

- headache
- drowsiness
- stomach upsets
- irritability
- muscle pains
- sweating
- a runny nose

