

1. Contract your pelvic floor muscles

Research has shown that when the pelvic floor muscles contract, the bladder (or detrusor muscle) relaxes. You can put this understanding to good use reduce urgency and unwanted leakage. When you notice an inappropriate bladder sensation, get into the habit of contracting your pelvic floor muscles. This can work well when combined with any one or a number of the following bladder control training techniques.

2. Apply pressure over your perineum or clitoris

We've all crossed our legs at one point or another. This is because pressure on the clitoris or perineum (area between the vagina and anus) helps reduce urgency. Next time you sense the onset of bladder urgency in public, try sitting and contracting your pelvic floor muscles with a strong pelvic floor muscle contraction. If you are at home you may wish to try applying gentle manual pressure using your hand. Many women find this is like an 'off switch' for the bladder.

3. Count your steps

Counting your steps on the way to the bathroom is a great way to help overcome that extreme sense of urgency and fear of leakage you may experience. This technique can help you to get to the toilet and avoid leakage on the way.

4. Walk don't run!

If you run or trot to the bathroom you will be much more likely to leak on the way. Instead walk, count your steps and relax your breathing as you do so. In this way you will be more likely to control your bladder and minimize or avoid unwanted leakage.

5. Relax your breathing

Ever noticed that when you feel urgency, you instinctively hold your breath? This actually makes the problem of urgency worse and can make you more likely to leak since when you inflate your lungs you inadvertently increase the downward pressure on your bladder and your pelvic floor. Ideally try to relax your breathing and contract your pelvic floor muscles.

6. Curl your toes

Toe curling is a great strategy for reducing bladder urgency. Next time you notice that uncomfortable urgent sensation when you are sitting down, try curling your toes downwards. This can work very well when combined with pelvic floor contraction and relaxed breathing.

7. Tap your sacrum

This technique involves tapping your low back when you feel urgent. Once again this technique can work well when combined with pelvic floor muscle contraction and pressure on the perineum i.e. sitting.

8. Avoid or limit your intake of bladder irritants

Some foods, drinks and spices can irritate your bladder and/or act as diuretics making the bladder fill quickly, irritating the lining of your bladder and causing urinary frequency.

Well known bladder irritants include; caffeine (coffee, tea, green tea), alcohol, spicy foods (Thai, Indian and Mexican), artificial sweeteners, carbonated drinks and acidic fruit juices (e.g. orange, pineapple, mango).

Caffeine and alcohol are bladder irritants and they are also diuretics meaning they can have an even greater effect on increasing bladder urgency. On the other hand herbal teas are irritant and caffeine free. If you are someone who really needs their coffee or tea, try to reduce the strength or opt for a decaffeinated option.

9. Manage your fluid intake

Most women should all aim to drink 2 litres of caffeine free fluid steadily throughout their waking hours. This can include herbal teas, water with a squeeze of lemon and non irritant juices. Women in hot and humid climates, and those involved in heavy work or sport may need to drink more than this.

Try to avoid withholding fluids as tempting as this may be. If you withhold fluids then ultimately you decrease the amount of fluid your bladder is capable of comfortably holding and you actually make your bladder problems worse. Ideally try to spread your fluid intake out through the day rather than trying to withhold fluids all day and then drinking at night to make up for this.

10. Anticipate your triggers

A trigger is something that can set off your urgency. Triggers are typically reinforced by a subsequent visit to the toilet and can become difficult to overcome. Sometimes we are aware of these, sometimes not. Common triggers include:

- Key in the front door/ leaving home
- Running water
- Cold weather
- Looking at or proximity to the toilet
- Feeling anxious (particularly about the proximity of the nearest rest room).

The techniques described above can help you to desensitize yourself to triggers as part of a bladder retraining program. For the purposes of this article however the first step is to notice what your particular triggers are, and then to anticipate and control for them by using the techniques described.

11. Avoid going just in case

When you use the rest room 'just in case' you reduce the amount your bladder could have actually held if allowed to fill a little more. Going to the bathroom 'just in case' creates a progressive cycle of incomplete bladder filling and as a result an increasingly earlier urge to empty and what is technically known as urinary frequency. If the situation is safe for you to try to hold on just a little longer, such as a day at home or in a safe situation, then try to hold on a little longer to help better fill your bladder and reduce the urgency that becomes associated with emptying your bladder at progressively smaller volumes.

Note: If you experience difficulty fully emptying your bladder, or if you suffer from incomplete bladder emptying then your condition needs to be discussed with your medical practitioner rather than performing this technique.

12. Regular pelvic floor exercises / Kegel exercises

Commitment to regular pelvic floor exercises / Kegel exercises which help act as bladder control exercise. If your pelvic floor muscles are functioning well, then you will be able to contract them readily when you experience urinary urgency. This type of bladder control exercise will also help you better control against unwanted leakage with urgency and help you reduce your urination frequency.

Important information & disclaimer : Bladder problems such as urinary urgency and/or urinary frequency can be caused by or associated with medical problems. If you experience urinary urgency or urinary frequency you are advised to speak with your medical practitioner about your condition before commencing bladder control training. This information is provided for general information only and should in no way be considered as a substitute for medical advice and information about your particular condition. While every effort has been made to ensure that the information is accurate, the author accepts no responsibility and cannot guarantee the consequences if individuals choose to rely upon these contents as their sole source of information about a condition and its rehabilitation.