

Frequently Asked Questions about Overactive Bladder

What is Overactive Bladder (OAB)?

Overactive Bladder (OAB) isn't a disease. It's the name of a group of urinary symptoms. The most common symptom of OAB is a sudden urge to urinate that you can't control. Some people will leak urine when they feel this urge. Having to urinate many times during the day and night is another symptom of OAB.

How common is OAB?

OAB is common. It affects millions of Americans. As many as 30 percent of men and 40 percent of women in the United States live with OAB symptoms.

Who is at risk for OAB?

As you grow older, you're at higher risk for OAB. But no matter what your age, there are treatments that can help.

Both men and women are at risk for OAB. Women who have gone through menopause ("change of life") have a higher than normal risk. Men who have had prostate problems also seem to have an increased risk for OAB. People with diseases that affect the brain or nervous system, such as stroke and multiple sclerosis (MS), are at high risk for OAB.

Food and drinks that can bother your bladder (like caffeine, alcohol and very spicy foods) may make OAB symptoms worse.

What is the major symptom of OAB?

The major symptom of OAB is a sudden, strong urge to urinate that you can't control. This "gotta go" feeling makes you fear you will leak urine if you don't get to a bathroom right away. This urge may or may not cause your bladder to leak urine.

If you live with OAB, you may also:

- ▶ Leak urine (incontinence): Sometimes people with OAB also have "urgency incontinence." This means that urine leaks when you feel the sudden urge to go. This isn't the same as "stress urinary incontinence" or "SUI." People with SUI leak urine while sneezing, laughing or doing other physical activities. (You can learn more about SUI at UrologyHealth.org/SUI.)
- ▶ Urinate frequently: You may also need to go to the bathroom many times during the day. The number of times someone urinates varies from person to person. But many experts agree that going to the bathroom more than eight times in 24 hours is "frequent urination."
- ▶ Wake up at night to urinate: Waking from sleep to go to the bathroom more than once a night is another symptom of OAB.

What causes OAB?

OAB can happen when nerve signals between your bladder and brain tell your bladder to empty even when it isn't full. OAB can also happen when the muscles in your bladder are too active. Either way, your bladder muscles "contract" to pass urine before they should. These contractions cause the sudden, strong urge to urinate.

How can OAB affect my health and my life?

OAB symptoms may make it hard to get through your day without many trips to the bathroom. You may even cancel activities because you're afraid of being too far from a restroom.

OAB can get in the way of your work, social life, exercise and sleep. Your symptoms may make you feel embarrassed and afraid of being wet in public. You may be tired from waking at night or



feel lonely from limiting social activities. If you are leaking urine it may cause skin problems or infections.

But you don't have to let OAB symptoms control your life. There are treatments to help. If you think you have OAB, please see your healthcare professional.

How will my healthcare professional diagnose OAB?

During your visit, your healthcare professional may:

- ▶ Gather facts about your past and current health problems, the symptoms you're having and how long you have had them, what medicines you take, and how much liquid you drink during the day.
- ▶ Do a physical exam to look for something that may be causing your symptoms, including examining your abdomen, as well as the organs in your pelvis and your rectum in women, or prostate and rectum in men.
- ▶ Collect a sample of your urine to check for infection or blood.
- ▶ Ask you to keep a "bladder diary" to learn more about your day-to-day symptoms.
- ▶ Do other tests, such as a urine culture or ultrasound, when needed.

Are there treatments for OAB?

Yes. There are treatments that can help you manage OAB. Your healthcare professional may use one treatment alone or several at the same time. Treatment choices include:

- ▶ Lifestyle changes: You can try changing what you eat and drink to see if less caffeine, alcohol, and spicy foods will reduce your symptoms; keeping a daily "bladder diary" of your trips to the bathroom; going to the bathroom at scheduled times during the day; and doing "quick flick" pelvic exercises to help you relax your bladder muscle when it contracts.

- ▶ Prescription drugs: Your healthcare professional may prescribe drugs that relax the bladder muscle to stop it from contracting at the wrong times.

If these treatments don't help, your healthcare professional should send you to a specialist, such as a urologist who may specialize in incontinence, for other tests and treatments.

What should I do if I think I have OAB?

Talk with your healthcare professional.

Sometimes OAB symptoms can be the result of a urinary tract infection (UTI), an illness, damage to nerves, or a side effect of a medication. So it's important to go to a healthcare professional to find out if you have any of these problems.

If you do have OAB, there are treatments to help. Together, you and your healthcare professional can choose what's best for you.

Where can I find help?

To get more facts on OAB, please visit ItsTimeToTalkAboutOAB.org. This site has printed materials you can order and a "Think You Have OAB?" quiz you can take. There, you will find a "bladder diary" that you can print out and use to track your symptoms. You can also use the Find-a-Urologist tool to find a specialist near you.

Get the facts. Get diagnosed. Take control.

ItsTimeToTalkAboutOAB.org

For more information, contact:

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