

Overactive Bladder

Frequently Asked Questions

IT'S TIME TO TALK
ABOUT OAB



What is Overactive Bladder (OAB)?

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

How common is OAB?

OAB is common. It affects over 30 million 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. 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. People with diseases that affect the brain or nervous system, such as stroke and multiple sclerosis (MS), are also at risk. Sometimes food and drinks can bother your bladder (like caffeine, alcohol and very spicy foods) and may make OAB symptoms worse.

What is the major symptom of OAB?

The major symptom of OAB is a sudden, strong urge to pass urine 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:

- **Leak urine.** Sometimes people with OAB have "urge incontinence." This means 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 when

sneezing, laughing or doing other physical activities. (You can learn more about SUI at UrologyHealth.org/SUI.)

- **Urinate frequently.** You may need to go to the bathroom many times during the day. The number of times someone urinates varies from person to person. Many experts agree that going to the bathroom more than eight times in 24 hours is "frequent urination."
- **Wake up at night to pass urine.** Waking from sleep to go to the bathroom more than once a night is another symptom of OAB.

What causes OAB?

Neurologic disorders and hormone changes play a role. OAB can happen when nerve signals in your 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 pass urine.

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.
- OAB can get in the way of your work, social life, exercise and sleep. Your symptoms may make you feel embarrassed and afraid of leaking in public. You may cancel activities because you don't want to be far from a restroom.
- 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.

You don't have to let OAB symptoms control your life. There are treatments to help. If you think you have OAB, please see a health care provider.

How is OAB diagnosed?

During your visit, your health care provider may:

- Gather facts about your past and current health problems, your symptoms, and how long you have had them. They will ask what medicines you take, and how much liquid you drink during the day.
- Examine you to look for something that may be causing your symptoms. They will look at your abdomen, pelvis and 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 about your day-to-day symptoms.
- Do other tests, such as a urine culture or bladder ultrasound, as needed.

Are there treatments for OAB?

Yes. There are treatments to help you manage OAB. Your health care provider may use one treatment alone or several at the same time. Options include:

- **Lifestyle Changes:** You can change what you eat and drink to see if less caffeine, alcohol, sweeteners and spicy foods will reduce your symptoms. Losing weight can help. Bladder training and scheduled bathroom visits may help. "Quick flick" pelvic exercises can help you relax and control your bladder muscle. If lifestyle changes don't help, your health care provider may refer you to a urologist who specializes in incontinence for other treatments.
- **Prescription Medications:** Medications that relax the bladder muscle to stop it from contracting at the wrong times may be an option for you. There are different types. You may try a couple until you find one that helps. If needed, you may be offered a combination of medicines.
- **Botox® (botulinum toxin) Treatments:** If other medications and lifestyle changes don't work, injections of Botox can stop bladder contractions for periods of time.

- **Nerve Stimulation:** This treatment, also called neuromodulation therapy, sends electrical signals to nerves in your bladder and pelvic area to improve OAB symptoms.
- **Bladder Reconstruction/Urinary Diversion Surgery:** This option is only used in very rare and serious cases. In these cases, two types are used: augmentation cystoplasty, which enlarges the bladder and urinary diversion, which re-routes the flow of urine.

What should I do if I think I have OAB?

Talk with a health care provider. 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. It's important to find out if you have any of these problems.

If you do have OAB, you can get help. You and your health care provider 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?" assessment you can take. There, you will also find a Bladder Diary to print out and use to track your symptoms. You can also use the Find-a-Urologist tool to find a specialist near you.

To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions** or go to **UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist** to find a doctor near you.

Disclaimer: This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologists or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.