Did You Know There Are Ways to Improve Bladder Control?

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How to Strengthen the Bladder

Approximately 17% of women over the age of 18 suffer from overactive bladder (OAB). This number increases with age and 20% of women over the age of 40 suffer from OAB. Also, 29% of women between the ages of 60 and 70 experience leakage of urine while coughing, sneezing, or laughing. You should know you are not alone. Your healthcare provider can recommend tips for how to strengthen the bladder and we have some tips for you too.

Why Is Improving Bladder Control Important?

Improving bladder control may seem silly. After all, aren't our bladders strong enough? Weren't we born with enough strength? And how are we supposed to strengthen them, anyway?

Well the answer is no, not everyone has a bladder that is strong enough. There are various reasons why OAB is experienced, such as childbirth. Childbirth weakens the muscles of pelvic girdle, making bladder control difficult.

Aside from the obvious, OAB is uncomfortable and makes life a bit more difficult due to frequent urination, it also infringes on other aspects of daily life. People with OAB tend to be less physically active for fear of incontinence. It is also uncomfortable to wear protective pads during physical activity. OAB can lead to depression and anxiety due to the emotional distress that is incurred by the symptoms. In addition, people who experience OAB often shy away from emotional intimacy because they fear urine leakage during sex. There are ways to take your life back.

What Methods Help With Improving Bladder Control?

There are various ways to improve bladder control; generally, your healthcare provider will recommend a multifaceted approach.

Medical Treatments

Medications may be prescribed, though they are often used after other means have failed, such as exercises and dietary modifications.

Common medications used to treat OAB:

- Antimuscarinics, such as oxybutynin and tolterodine
- Beta-3 agonists
- Beta-3 adrenergic receptor stimulators
- Tricyclic antidepressants

In addition, botulinum toxin A, or Botox, can be injected into the bladder. This helps reduce bladder spasms.

At-Home Remedies

Your healthcare provider may make some recommendations to make OAB easier on you and to strengthen your bladder.

One of the first home remedies it to consume the correct amount of liquids at the right time. Becoming dehydrated further irritates the bladder, worsening symptoms. Though it sounds counterintuitive, drinking plenty of liquids can improve symptoms. However, drinking lots of liquids close to bedtime is not a good idea either. It is a good idea to limit fluids a few hours before bedtime.

Another great thing you can do to help your OAB symptoms is incorporating regular physical activity. This may be difficult and uncomfortable, but taking that daily walk or run can keep the pounds off.

According to NIH NIDDK, “Losing weight can help you have fewer leaks, and avoiding weight gain may prevent UI. Studies suggest that, as your body mass index (BMI) increases, you’re more likely to leak.”

Also, avoid constipation by staying hydrated and consuming an adequate amount of fiber. Constipation can worsen symptoms of OAB because excess stool places pressure on the bladder.

Exercises for OAB

If your healthcare provider recommends exercising to treat your symptoms, they have good intentions. There are exercises that can strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor.

Why are pelvic floor muscles so important? These muscles are powerful, though some health conditions can make them less strong, affecting how your bladder holds urine. One exercise that your provider will likely prescribe is the Kegel exercise.

To perform the Kegel exercise, you should make sure that you are engaging the right muscles. Feel for the muscles in the vagina (for women), bladder and anus. If you are still unsure, imagine that you are trying to keep yourself from passing gas. Also, make sure that the bladder is emptied, then sit or lie down. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles; hold tightly for three to five seconds. Then, relax the muscles and perform this sequence again for three to five seconds. You can repeat this 10 times, or three times per day.

Your healthcare provider may ask that you work with a physical therapist that specializes in pelvic floor therapy.

Naturopathic Remedies

Before taking any naturopathic remedies, you should discuss the treatments with your healthcare provider. Research is limited and some can interact with prescription medication.

Common naturopathic remedies used to treat OAB symptoms:

- Goshi-jinki-jan, a blend of 10 traditional Chinese herbs that may improve bladder contractions.
- Ganoderma lucidum
- Corn silk has been used to treat nighttime incontinence and bladder irritation for centuries
- Pumpkin seed extract may be beneficial for nighttime irritation as well as OAB

Other therapies that may be helpful:

- Research indicates that acupuncture is a viable treatment for all symptoms of OAB
- Research also indicates that the use of biofeedback may be an excellent first-line treatment of OAB in children

The Bottom Line

Taking control of your bladder can improve your OAB symptoms and your life. Tack back this control by knowing how to strengthen the bladder.