How to Deal With Overactive Bladder and Dehydration

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Overactive Bladder and Dehydration: What You Need to Know

Overactive bladder (OAB) can be difficult to deal with and can also be embarrassing. You may think restricting your fluid intake will solve the problem or at least lessen it, but this is actually false. Yes — reducing your fluids can actually make your OAB symptoms worse. Let's explore what the link is exactly between overactive bladder and dehydration.

Hydration and OAB

The key to reducing OAB symptoms is striking a balance between over-hydration and dehydration — meaning, being properly hydrated at all times.

Obviously, drinking excess fluids can lead to a full bladder, which can lead to urinary frequency and possible incontinence. Dehydration can be just as bad.

Not ingesting the correct amount of fluids results in highly-concentrated urine. Highly-concentrated urine may irritate the bladder, causing urinary tract infections, which will ultimately exacerbate OAB symptoms.

So, what is the perfect balance in terms of hydration for OAB sufferers? According to the American Urogynecologic Society, the old adage of eight glasses of water each day may be inaccurate, especially for an OAB sufferer. They recommend drinking when thirsty. Your urine should be light yellow or colorless.

In a world so obsessed with hydration, how then are you supposed to cut back on your water intake if you are ingesting too much for your OAB?

- Spread fluids throughout the day.
- Don’t carry a large bottle with you all day — you will be more apt to drink extra water.
- Use a smaller cup at meals.
- Keep in mind that fluids are also ingested from the foods we eat, such as fruits, vegetables and soups.

What Should You Be Drinking?

Water is the beverage of choice for bladder health, as other beverages are known to exacerbate OAB symptoms. Water has no added ingredients that will irritate the bladder, making it the perfect beverage to sip throughout the day.

Cranberry juice, consumed in moderation, may reduce the risk of urinary tract infections. It is believed that this juice prevents bacteria from sticking to the bladder wall. However, it is acidic so it may not be a tolerable beverage.

What Beverages Should You Avoid?

Aside from cranberry juice, most juices should be avoided. Juices are highly acidic, which may cause irritation of the bladder.

Some people find that dairy products irritate their bladder. This is especially true if OAB is caused by interstitial cystitis, which is chronic inflammation of the bladder. If your OAB is caused by interstitial cystitis, consider eliminating dairy products.

Alcohol and caffeine are both bladder stimulants, exacerbating OAB symptoms. Decreasing these items from your diet may also decrease that unpleasant urge. Be aware that caffeine is not only found in coffee, sodas and energy drinks, but is also found in tea and chocolate.

Studies show that caffeine may not need to be eliminated completely; limiting caffeine intake to below 100 milligrams per day (the amount in one cup of drip coffee) can greatly reduce symptoms.

You may notice exacerbated symptoms of overactive bladder when drinking alcohol because alcohol increases urine production and can irritate the bladder.

Beverages that are bubbly, such as carbonated water and seltzers, and beverages sweetened with sugar of artificial sweeteners may also irritate the bladder.

Other Habits to Adopt

Consider setting a time limit to your beverage intake when it comes to overactive bladder and dehydration. Ingesting fluids too late in the evening may make you run to the bathroom throughout the night.

Keep in mind that while this tip is helpful, it is not recommended if you have not had an adequate amount of fluids during the day — the goal is to maintain proper hydration. If you need to keep drinking water past your normal stop time in order to stay hydrated, continue to do so.

Sometimes, it may be necessary to change your diet as well. For example, if you note that acidic or sugary beverages exacerbate your symptoms, it may be prudent to also decrease the intake of these foods in your diet. Some people also report that spicy foods irritate their bladder.

If all else fails, keep a bladder diary to pinpoint the culprit of your symptoms. A bladder diary includes food and beverage intake and urination patterns. Studying the diary after a period of time may yield surprising results that you would not have picked up on.