Non-Medication Strategies for Managing Overactive Bladder

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Have You Tried Natural Treatment for Overactive Bladder?

Overactive bladder (OAB) affects roughly 33 million American adults, and has a significant effect on your quality of life and sleep quality, as well as your emotional and mental health.

It's also extremely frustrating. OAB sufferers always need to be a short distance from a bathroom and often have the nearest one mapped out, wherever they are.

The exact cause of OAB is unknown, but enlarged prostate in men, urinary tract infections, weakened muscles that control urination, being overweight, smoking, stretched pelvic muscles from childbirth, side effects of medications, and irritable bowel syndrome are all believed to be contributing factors.

While the Urology Care Foundation reports 30 percent of men and 40 percent of women in the United States are affected by OAB, it is possible these percentages are much higher. That is because most people who have OAB don’t disclose OAB symptoms to their doctors.

Some people are embarrassed and don’t know how to talk to their medical providers about their symptoms. Others don’t tell their doctors because they don’t think there is anything that can be done to treat OAB.

While there are medications that may help, there are also a variety of non-medication strategies that are helpful. Continue reading to learn tactics for decreasing that annoying urge to run to the nearest bathroom.

Natural At-Home Treatments for OAB

You can take medications to decrease urgency, frequency, and incontinence, but these medications cause side effects. Natural and at home treatments can help you control OAB without side effects and also help you maintain healthy bladder function.

Here are some home remedies worth trying to help you manage your overactive bladder.

Herbal Treatments

Several types herbs, including, gosha-jinki-gan (GJG) may help you manage urgency and frequency. These herbs for overactive bladder include the following.

GJG is a blend of 10 traditional Chinese herbs and several studies have shown it can inhibit bladder and daytime frequency. One study out of Japan found that 46 percent of female patients taking 7.6mg per day of GJG were experiencing less urgency and frequency during daytime hours.

Ganoderma lucidum (GL) is a mushroom from East Asia used to manage many ailments, including OAB. In one

study reported in the medical journal *Reviews in Urology* showed most of the men taking GL were experiencing improved prostate health and fewer urinary tract infections.

Other herbal remedies that have been recommended for managing OAB are cleavers, cornsilk, horsetail, and resiniferatoxin, but there isn't enough clinical evidence on their effectiveness or safety in treating OAB.

Before you try any herbal remedies, it is important to note the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate herbal medicines and some may contain additional ingredients that are not listed on the labels and these may interact with medications you are already taking.

You may also want to see a doctor who specializes in complementary medicine if you want to go this route, and always tell your medical doctor what alternative treatments you are thinking about trying.

Diet to Manage OAB Symptoms

There are some foods, vitamins and supplements can help you to manage OAB symptoms. You should also avoid foods that irritate the bladder.

Pumpkin Seeds

The use of pumpkin seeds to manage urinary flow goes far back. Pumpkin seeds are loaded with omega-3 fatty acids, which have anti-inflammatory properties.

One study found that pumpkin seed oil improves urinary function and reduces OAB symptoms. You can purchase pumpkin seed oil at your local or online health food stores.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C may help you to manage oxidative stress, this according to researchers at Harvard Medical School. Oxidative stress has been linked to bladder irritation and urinary problems.

The recommended daily amount of vitamin for women is 75 mg and 90mg for men. It is possible you can get enough vitamin C from food sources and in doing so, you may have fewer problems when emptying your bladder.

Magnesium

Some researchers believe magnesium helps manage OAB symptoms by reducing bladder spasms and assisting the bladder in emptying completely. One trial out of Israel found women taking 350 mg of magnesium hydroxide twice a day for two weeks were having better bladder control and fewer OAB symptoms than women who took a placebo.

Foods to Avoid

Avoiding some foods and drinks that contribute to OAB symptoms can help minimize your urgency and frequency issues. Some foods to avoid include:

- Alcoholic beverages
- Artificial sweeteners
- Chocolate
- Citrus
- Coffee, tea and soda
- Tomato based foods
- Spicy foods

Water is hydrating, but not all beverages have the same effect on your bladder. In fact, some of our favorite

beverages — alcohol and coffee — are diuretics. This means that consuming these beverages increases the urge to urinate due to the fact that more urine is produced.

Alcohol and coffee can actually irritate the bladder as well. It is recommended to limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day if you have OAB.

Slowly decreasing coffee intake due to withdrawal is recommended, and eventually switch to decaf. Be aware that decaf coffee may still contain small amounts of caffeine — not enough to cause problems for the average person, but may still cause problems for the OAB sufferer.

Soda can be especially harmful. Regular soda that is caffeinated will have a similar effect as alcohol and coffee, in addition to carbonation that may exacerbate OAB symptoms.

Sugary foods, including chocolate and foods sweetened with artificial sweeteners, may also irritate the bladder, exacerbating OAB symptoms. Evidence points to decreasing these beverages as opposed to cutting them out completely.

Spicy foods and citrus fruits may also irritate the bladder. Spicy foods are known to be an irritant primarily for women with OAB.

Citrus fruits include common fruits you may think of, but also other acidic fruits such as tomatoes and cranberry juice. Cranberry juice can be particularly confusing to OAB sufferers, as it has been linked to controlling UTI symptoms. However, the acidity worsens OAB symptoms.

Next page: lifestyle changes as a natural treatment for overactive bladder.

Lifestyle Changes

You can manage many of your OAB symptoms by making simple lifestyle changes, including staying properly hydrated, managing weight, quitting smoking, and with Kegel exercises and bladder retraining.

Proper Hydration

Often, OAB sufferers think that dehydrating themselves will decrease their OAB symptoms. It may sound counterintuitive, but staying properly hydrated (overactive bladder dehydration and overhydration are both issues) can decrease symptoms.

Decreasing fluid intake can cause a laundry list of problems, such as dehydration, constipation, and kidney stones; all the above can irritate the bladder and worsen symptoms.

Overhydration will fill the bladder too much, exacerbating OAB symptoms. So, what’s the perfect balance?

You may have heard the old adage that we should be drinking eight glasses of water each day. According to the American Urogynecologic Society, this is not recommended for OAB sufferers — people with OAB are recommended to drink when thirsty.

Stay away from beverages that worsen OAB symptoms, but take sips of water throughout the day and limit your liquid consumption close to bedtime.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Extra weight is a problem because it increases pressure on your bladder and causes urine leaks with even simple activities, such as laughing, coughing, sneezing, or lifting. Eat healthy and get regular exercise to help you lose weight and maintain a healthy diet.

Quit Smoking

As if you needed another reason to quit smoking — smokers are more likely than non-smokers to have bladder control issues; this may be due in part to the chronic cough that many smokers have. This chronic cough will put pressure on the bladder repeatedly.

If you smoke, you should quit because smoking irritates the bladder muscles. Smoker's cough also contributes to OAB symptoms.

Kegels

Kegel exercises help to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. Performing these exercises can not only increase the strength of the pelvic floor, but also promote urinary sphincter control because the pelvic floor muscles are used to open and close the urethra. They also support the bladder during everyday activities.

Kegel exercises can be performed easily and discreetly. To do them, simply squeeze the pelvic floor muscles tightly, as if trying to control your stream of urine. Physicians recommend performing these exercises three to four times per day.

The good news is you can do them anywhere and no one will know you are doing them!

Kegel exercises can help you to minimize bladder contractions. These exercises are safe and don’t pose any complications or side effects.

According the Urology Care Foundation, the most general way to do these is by squeezing the muscles of the anus in the same way you would stop yourself from passing gas. The squeezed muscles are the pelvic floor muscles and if you feel a pulling sensation at the anus, you are using the right muscles.

Bladder Training

Bladder retraining can help you strengthen your bladder muscles. This works best with Kegel exercises.

The basic idea is to let the urge to urinate pass instead of rushing to the bathroom right away. You then gradually work your way to holding your bladder for longer times.

The steps involved in a bladder training program include:

1. **Keep a diary.** For a few days, write down when you urinate. This can help to create a bladder training schedule.
2. **Assess your diary.** Look at your bladder diary. Assess the amount of time in between voids. Then, increase the amount of time by 15 minutes.
3. **Stick to the schedule.** Stick to the routine that you’ve set. Use the restroom immediately when waking, then stick to the schedule. If you feel like you will have an accident, use the restroom but return to the schedule after.
4. **Use relaxation techniques.** When you feel like you’ve got to go and it isn’t time, test out different relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises. These not only will relax you, but distract you.
5. **Increase time between intervals.** Increase the time between voids. Perhaps increase by 15 minutes every week until you reach an interval of two to four hours.

The Bottom Line

Overactive bladder can interfere with your life professionally, personally and socially. It can prevent you from living your life and cause anxiety, depression and self-esteem issues.

By trying to manage your symptoms at home, you are trying charge of your health and minimizing and preventing

embarrassing scenarios. These methods are natural and safe and can make a difference without the worry of unwanted side effects.

Having an overactive bladder can be frustrating and embarrassing — but it does not have to control your life!