Coping With OAB and Holiday Stress

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Managing Holiday Stress With Overactive Bladder

If you suffer from OAB, chances are holiday stress can interfere with your enjoyment. After all, it can be difficult to celebrate the moment when you know the urge "to go" could hit at any time, which puts a damper on holiday festivities. But while you may not be able to cure your OAB, you can certainly control your symptoms and reduce holiday stress with some smart choices and a good backup plan.

Why It's Important to Watch What You Eat

When it comes to OAB triggers, eating habits are at the top of the list. And since changes in eating patterns are almost universal around the holidays, you'll need to pay extra attention to how and what you eat. Keep in mind that:

- **Gaining weight can worsen symptoms.** Maintaining a healthy weight is important for a number of reasons and it can have an effect on bladder health. Studies have shown that overweight women who were able to lose just a moderate amount (8% of their body weight) often see improvements in their OAB symptoms. Try to stick to healthy foods over the holidays, with only a few small splurges.
- **Certain sweets can lead to leakage.** Honey, chocolate, citrus juices, corn syrup and some artificial sweeteners have been known to irritate the bladder and exacerbate OAB. Unfortunately, these ingredients are abundant in holiday feasts, so you'll have to be extra careful at parties and gatherings.
- **The right beverage balance is important.** Drinking too much liquid will surely make you go more often, but not enough liquid results in concentrated urine that is more likely to irritate the bladder and could lead to infection. Find the sweet spot by staying evenly hydrated with frequent sipping; water is typically the best choice for everyone, but a bit of juice (especially cranberry) is fine. Alcohol and caffeine are diuretics, which means they promote the production of urine – steer clear if you want to avoid OAB symptoms.

Although you'll have to be a bit of a picky eater at parties, don't fret about everything. Allow yourself a little indulgence, but space out your drinks and your treats so you aren't rushing to the bathroom in the middle of every conversation. You should be able to enjoy yourself in social situations, and you can do that more easily with a bit of preparation.

Tips to Relieve Worry and Increase Comfort

You may be tempted to ignore your OAB and simply hope for the best, but it's a better idea to address your weaknesses and prepare to compensate with a few useful approaches:

- **Guard against leaks.** It may not feel particularly elegant, but an absorbent pad or incontinence underwear can save you a lot of embarrassment, especially when you're in an unfamiliar site with few bathrooms. Sanitary pads are another option for light leaks.
- **Nourish your bladder.** Eat a little before you head out to a gathering, which will keep you full and ward

off the temptation of the buffet table. Also, prepare to bring a dish of your own that you know won't trigger your OAB. The less you have to worry about triggers, the better for your body and mind.

- **Plan out your route.** When you arrive at an unfamiliar place, scope out the washrooms right away. If you plan to be on the road during the holidays, stick to well-traveled roads and locate the public washrooms ahead of time, so you know where you can stop en route.
- **Train your bladder.** Since one of the biggest discomforts of OAB is the anticipation of your next sudden urge to go, take control by training your bladder to work when you want it to. It does take a few months to retrain your bladder, but a good short-term technique is "time voiding": scheduling bathroom visits at regular intervals, and going at that time regardless of your urge.

The holidays can be hectic, filled with unexpected visits, last-minute errands and tempting treats in place of balanced meals, which makes it difficult to tend to your OAB symptoms. Start preparing well before the stressful time of the season, with Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles and a bladder diary to keep track of OAB patterns and triggers, so you can feel more confident and carefree when the festivities begin.