

ABOUT OVERACTIVE BLADDER

A MISUNDERSTOOD AND CONCEALED CONDITION

Overactive bladder (OAB), a condition affecting more than 17 million men and women in the United States, is a common problem that is widely misunderstood and seldom discussed with a physician or anyone else.¹

WHAT IS OVERACTIVE BLADDER?

Overactive bladder is a medical condition that affects the detrusor muscle, which is the muscle that contracts to empty the bladder. Normally, a signal is sent to the brain when the bladder is full, and the detrusor muscle then receives the signal to contract and empty the bladder. For patients with overactive bladder, the muscle contracts while the bladder is filling with urine (instead of waiting for the bladder to be full), thus creating the urge to urinate more frequently and before the bladder is completely full.²

KEY SYMPTOMS

Overactive bladder has a number of symptoms, with sufferers reporting any combination of one or more of the following:

- **Urgency**³—the sudden, compelling desire to urinate. This symptom can occur with or without urge incontinence (leakage). Sufferers experience strong, sudden urges to urinate, even if their bladder is not full.²
- **Frequency**³—urinating 8 or more times during a 24-hour period.
- **Urge incontinence**³—an involuntary, accidental loss of urine, also called “leakage” or “incontinence.” Overactive bladder sufferers who experience urge incontinence are often described as having “wet” overactive bladder. Those who experience the sense of urge without any leakage are described as having “dry” overactive bladder.⁴

Urge incontinence associated with overactive bladder is different from stress urinary incontinence (SUI). In SUI, a trigger, such as laughing or coughing, precedes the event that causes leakage to occur.³

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WHO IS AFFECTED BY OVERACTIVE BLADDER?

- Overactive bladder affects men and women at approximately the same rate.
 - Prevalence is 16.9 percent of women and 16 percent of men within the population.⁴
- However, the symptom of urge incontinence is more prevalent among women (9.3 percent) than men (2.6 percent).¹ Men tend to have higher rates of “dry” overactive bladder, including symptoms of urgency and frequency.⁴
- While overactive bladder is often perceived as an “older” person’s condition, about half of those affected are between the ages of 35 and 64 years of age.⁵
- No precise cause for overactive bladder has been identified, rather it is defined as a symptom complex that is not necessarily a consequence of aging.²

THE COST OF OVERACTIVE BLADDER

Overactive bladder often affects more than the individual. Along with physical symptoms, overactive bladder can cause a decline in health, vitality, and psychosocial interaction. In addition, there is an economic burden to be considered.²

- Symptoms can occur at any time without warning. Fear of having an “accident” in public often curtails professional and social activities and can create a sense of isolation.¹
- Wetting accidents, whether real or the fear of having one, are a key concern of many overactive bladder sufferers and can affect their physical, social, and emotional well-being.¹
- Overactive bladder often causes sufferers to get up multiple times during the night to go to the bathroom, increasing the risk for falls and fractures related to falls.⁴
- Sleep disruption negatively affects the ability to function during the day.⁴
- Overactive bladder often results in a higher rate of urinary tract infections.⁴
- In 2000, the estimated cost related to overactive bladder in the United States was nearly \$14 billion, similar to that of gynecological and breast cancers, osteoporosis, or arthritis.⁶

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COPING WITH OVERACTIVE BLADDER

Because the condition comes on gradually, many people—wet and dry—learn to adapt their routines to accommodate their fear of leaking. Their routine changes may include^{1,7}:

- Employing bathroom mapping, ensuring they know where a bathroom is at all times
- Limiting daily travel to places and routes where they know all of the bathroom locations
- Reducing fluid intake
- Avoiding sexual intimacy
- Wearing adult incontinence pads, diapers, or sanitary protection
- Carrying a change of clothes at all times
- Wearing dark, often baggy clothing to hide wet spots
- Sitting on the aisle at theaters or on planes
- Sitting closest to the door for easy access to the bathroom

In some cases, sufferers stop pursuing social and physical activities and put their lives “on hold.”

MANAGING THE PROBLEM

Despite the impact on their lives and potential risk of other medical conditions, unfortunately many suffer in silence. As many as 40 percent of people with overactive bladder do not mention it to their healthcare professional. Of those that do, nearly 75 percent do not receive pharmacologic therapy.⁸ Awareness of effective treatment options and a discussion with the physician are important first steps for sufferers.

Understanding Treatment

- Antimuscarinic therapies (also known as muscarinic receptor antagonists or anticholinergics) are the mainstay of therapy.²
- New antimuscarinic therapies are available, many of which focus on helping to relieve leakage in “wet” patients.⁹

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- Behavioral management techniques can be used along with antimuscarinic therapy to help manage symptoms. These techniques include²:
 - Kegel exercises (pelvic muscle exercises)
 - Fluid management (regulate intake of liquids)
 - Bladder training (going to the bathroom at regular intervals)
- Many individuals attempt to manage overactive bladder by using only coping strategies, which may not completely address their symptoms.¹

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