

What is overactive bladder?

Overactive bladder (OAB) is a urological condition that affects men and women of all ages.¹ An estimated 20% of Canadian women over the age of 35 suffer from OAB.¹ While there may be different causes of OAB, one thing is certain: OAB is not normal in anyone of any age.²

Normally when your bladder is full, nerves in the bladder send a signal to the brain indicating the need to go to the bathroom. Once you reach the bathroom, your brain sends a signal to the large muscle (the detrusor) in the bladder to contract. This contraction pushes the urine out of your bladder. At the same time, the support muscles surrounding your urethra (the sphincter muscles) get a signal from the brain to relax and allow the urine to pass through.²

OAB occurs when the detrusor muscle contracts involuntarily. This causes the person to feel a sudden and sometimes overwhelming urge to urinate, even when the bladder is not full.²

What are the symptoms of OAB?

Symptoms of OAB include frequent (more than 8 times per day) urination, an uncomfortably strong urge to urinate that is difficult to defer and is sometimes accompanied by a loss of urine due to the urgency sensation.³

What causes OAB?

There can be many possible causes of OAB, however, in the majority of cases, the cause is unknown. OAB problems can also occur when the nervous system does not work properly due to disease or injury.²

How is OAB treated?

OAB treatment may include behavioural and lifestyle changes, physical therapy such as pelvic floor muscle exercises commonly called “Kegel” exercises, bladder retraining (making a schedule for bathroom trips), bio-feedback to ensure the correct muscles are being exercised and dietary changes.⁴

There are also medications that are effective in treating OAB. In many instances, combining drug treatment with some of the non-medical management options described above may provide the best improvement of OAB symptoms.^{2, 5}

Surgery is a last resort treatment option. It is not even considered until all other therapies have been tried without success.²

Can a doctor help treat OAB?

Yes. OAB is a treatable medical condition, yet many patients never seek help.² Doctors treat thousands of patients suffering from OAB every year, helping them return to a more normal life. Doctors can also help relieve the feelings of anxiety, embarrassment and isolation that can result from OAB symptoms.

Does OAB have an impact on quality of life?

Yes. OAB is not a minor inconvenience for the person who suffers from it. OAB can limit or end physical activities. It can require wearing specialized underwear and/or absorbent pads. It can result in ongoing disrupted sleep.^{2, 6}

In the workplace, OAB can impair performance and reduce social interaction. When traveling, the sufferer has to plan the entire trip around toilet accessibility.²

OAB can lead to feelings of intense discomfort, shame, loss of self-esteem and depression. It can impair sexual relationships and intimacy.⁶

How can I help someone suffering from OAB?

When it comes to talking about your Overactive Bladder symptoms, it is important to know that you are not alone. OAB is a widespread problem. But your doctor can assure you that it is usually a correctable problem.⁷ Perhaps the easiest way to bring up the subject of Overactive Bladder is by talking to the nurse. When you call to make an appointment, or are completing pre-exam paperwork, simply state that you would like to discuss a problem with bladder control. That way, the doctor will be able to open the discussion and help you to talk about your symptoms.

For more information on OAB support, visit www.overactivebladder.ca or call 1-877-662-2825.

References

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