Bladder Management in MS

Bladder problems can be common in multiple sclerosis and 60 to 80% of people experience some kind of problem at some time. In the general population bladder control problems affect all age groups—young children and adolescents through to older people. It can be related to pregnancy and childbirth, surgery, prostate problems, neurological conditions or caused by infection.

The bladder's function is to store and expel urine in a controlled, coordinated manner. It is controlled by the central nervous system. Damage to areas of the spinal cord and/or brain that control different phases of storing urine or emptying the bladder, can cause different types of bladder problems.

Bladder Problems

There are three main types of bladder problems that can occur in multiple sclerosis:

1) Failure to store urine: the urine comes out too frequently and too easily. When a person first gets the urge, he or she doesn’t have much time to get to the toilet and has to go quite often; more than 6 – 8 times a day and also during the night. Sometimes if a person doesn’t make it to the toilet they can lose control of their bladder.

2) Failure to empty urine: The urine just doesn’t want to come out. The stream of urine is weak, or starts and stops, and it is also difficult for the person to get started. Sometimes when the bladder is full, the urine overflows and starts dribbling out. The urine left in the bladder may cause a urinary infection (a bit like a stagnant pond) or bladder stones.

3) The third type of bladder problem is a combination of both of these.

There are several treatment options but assessment and advice, from a nurse or GP, is important.

Treatment Options

Simple measures are important and consist of eating a healthy diet and drinking two litres of fluid a day. People who are having bladder problems will often cut down their fluid intake because of incontinence but this can result in concentrated urine which acts as an irritant on the bladder, increasing the problems of frequency and urgency. Coffee, tea and carbonated drinks contain caffeine and this can also increase frequency.

Having easy and timely access to a toilet is very important. Notice how soon after a drink or a meal you feel the urge to empty your bladder, so you can time your activities appropriately.
Pelvic floor exercises, reducing excess weight and ceasing smoking are all lifestyle changes known to help reduce bladder problems in MS.

There are also medications that are used to stop the over active bladder which causes frequency, or for the weak bladder which stops the urine coming out. There are a few different medications and one will work better for one person than another. It is a matter of trial and error to find the most suitable one. When the problem is due to frequency and urgency causing incontinence, and not helped by medication, there is the option of pads for women or an uridome for men (this is a condom with adhesive at the top and a tube connected to a collecting bag at the bottom).

If medication doesn’t work to empty the bladder, “intermittent self catheterization” can be used. The person is taught to insert a thin tube into the bladder three or four times a day to empty the bladder. When there are difficulties with arm control or transferring on to the toilet the use of an indwelling catheter (one that stays in the bladder) may be a way to cope with the problem. This is only done when other methods have been tried first.

**Continence Aids**

There are many different types of aids available to assist such as protective devices, pads and special pants for men and women. Financial assistance is available from the Continence Aids Payment Scheme to assist with buying continence products. This is available for people under 64 years who are on a Disability Pension. For more information visit [www.bladderbowel.gov.au/caps/](http://www.bladderbowel.gov.au/caps/). Your MS Continence Nurse may also be able to access product subsidies for concession card holders through the Continence Management Action Scheme in Western Australia. Phone 08 9365 4888 for more details.

There is also a National Continence Helpline 1800 33 00 66 who can provide advice and counselling on continence problems and products.

**MSWA Services**

Bladder problems can be common in some people with multiple sclerosis and occur for different reasons. It is very important to talk to someone who understands these problems and can help. Your Neurologist, MSWA community nurse or the Continence Advisor at the local hospital can all be of assistance.

The MSWA Nursing Team have several nurses specialising in continence advice, including the assessment and management of your bladder issues. Phone 08 9365 4888 for more information or visit [mswa.org.au](http://mswa.org.au)