

# Getting Back Control

## Step 2: Behaviour Retraining

### WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR RETRAINING??

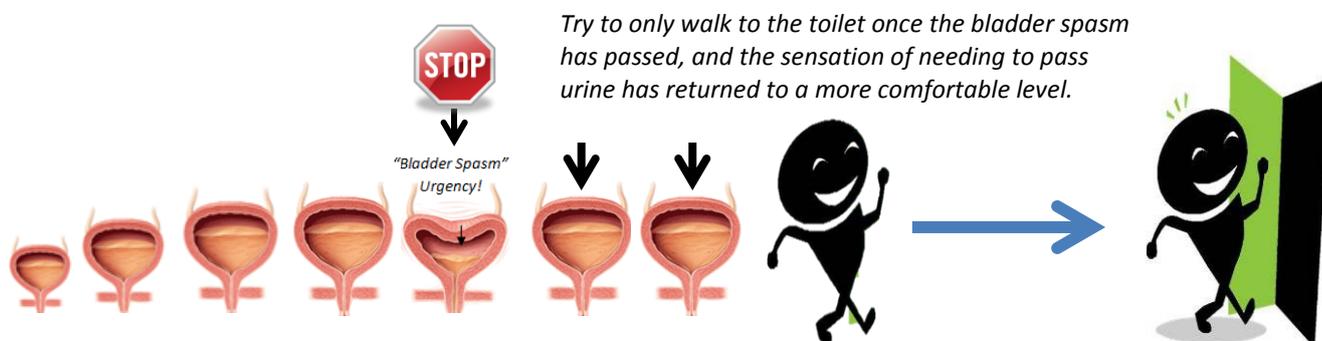
During times of urgency (when your bladder is 'spasming') it is understandable that you feel a strong instinctive urge to race to the toilet.



The problem with doing this is that at these times (ie in the middle of a bladder spasm) the bladder is already creating a lot of force trying to push the urine out!!! If you then suddenly stand up from your chair or begin racing to the toilet you add even greater pressure to your bladder increasing the chance you will experience leakage of urine.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO??

Behaviour retraining is about changing *how you react* to these intense episodes of "Urgency" (bladder spasms). The first step is to realise that if you can wait a minute or so and use some techniques known to relax the bladder, the spasm will often pass. Waiting and walking to the toilet after the spasm has passed will mean you are less likely to leak urine because there is less pressure trying to push the urine out.

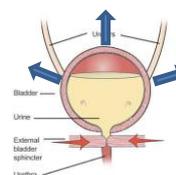


*Try to only walk to the toilet once the bladder spasm has passed, and the sensation of needing to pass urine has returned to a more comfortable level.*

### HOW CAN YOU HELP THE BLADDER SPASM PASS??

There are various reflexes in the body now known to relax the bladder when it is in the middle of a spasm. Activating these reflexes when you feel a desperate urge to pass urine can help the bladder spasm pass more quickly. Some of the reflexes are quite amazing so if you are interested in the anatomy feel free to read the explanations over the page. Some of the reflexes include

- **Relaxed Breathing**
- **Curling your toes in your shoes**
- **Rising up onto the balls of your feet and tightening your calf muscles**
- **Using your hand to place pressure upwards against your genital region**
- **Sitting down with the heel of your foot pressed up against your genital region**
- **Counting backwards from a large number by 7's eg start at 103**
- **Contracting your pelvic floor\*\* (see note below)**



\*\*Note: Some people have urgency because of overactivity of their pelvic floor muscles rather than overactivity of their bladder. If this is the case, a pelvic floor contraction during an episode of urgency is likely to make your urgency worse. Make sure you let your physiotherapist know if your urgency gets worse when you contract your pelvic floor.

## THE BLADDER RELAXATION REFLEXES

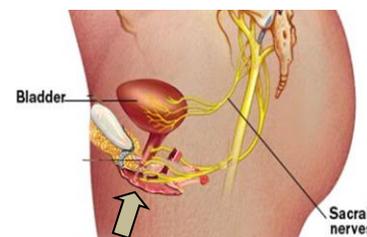
*Reflexes that Help Stop our Bladder Contracting*

### 1. Pressure on the front of your Genital Region / Sitting on the heel of your Foot

The pudendal nerve is a special nerve in our body that sends messages from our genital region to the spinal cord. Interestingly, these messages are sent to the same area of our spinal cord that our bladder messages are sent.

#### Why is this helpful??

The body is not very good at using a single part of the spinal cord for two purposes at the same time. Therefore, if you place pressure upward against your genital region during a bladder spasm, the body will focus on sending these messages rather than sending messages to and from the bladder. Your urgent need to pass urine should reduce!!



#### Strategies:

*When you get an intense urge to pass urine try -*

- Pressing upward on your genital region with your hand (really only useful if you are alone!)
- Sitting on the heel of your foot to provide pressure near the front of the vagina
- Sitting on the corner of a table or arm of a chair
- If none of these are possible.....Simply sit down! (*this won't place specific pressure but is better than nothing*)

### 2. Standing on Your Toes or Curling/Clawing Your Toes in your Shoes

Our '*posterior tibial nerve*' is a major nerve that runs from our spinal cord down the back of our leg and under our foot. It is another nerve that attaches to our spinal cord at S<sub>2,3</sub> (the area of our bladder nerves). Medical research involving the activation of this nerve via a fine wire needle (called PTNS) has shown that activating this nerve dramatically reduces detrusor overactivity, sensations of urgently needing to go to the toilet and urge incontinence episodes.



#### Strategies to Activate your Tibial Nerve

Normally the tibial nerve works to tighten our calf muscles and curls our toes.

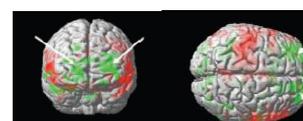
Therefore.....*When you get an intense urge to pass urine try -*

- Sitting down and curl your toes in your shoes
- Grip the carpet if you have bare feet
- Rising up on to the balls of your feet, gripping with your toes and tensing your calf muscles (either sitting or standing)



### 3. Counting Backwards by 7's / Distracting Yourself by Making a Shopping List

The part of our brain that normally helps to keep our bladder relaxed is called the Pre-Frontal Cortex. This front area of the brain is known for organisational tasks, list based activities etc. When we feel panicked by a sensation of urgency we quickly move to the emotional part of our brain and our frontal area switches off!!



Keeping the frontal part of your brain working will help to keep your bladder relaxed. When a bladder spasm occurs and you feel a sensation of urgency, try to concentrate on something difficult that involves numbers, lists, order of tasks etc.