

Overactive Bladder

What You Should Know



Overactive bladder (OAB) is the name for a group of bladder problems. Millions of people in the United States struggle with OAB. The good news is there are treatments for OAB. If you think you need help, ask for it, even if you feel embarrassed. Talk with your health care team about your symptoms, and how it affects your life. Together, you can find out if you have OAB, and you can get the help you need to manage it.

What is OAB?

When you have OAB, your bladder has a strong urge to pass urine even when your bladder isn't really full. Sometimes, the bladder is overly sensitive. Other times, the bladder squeezes to pass urine even when you don't want it to.

Symptoms

There are three main symptoms:

- Urgent feeling to pass urine. This "gotta go" feeling makes people afraid they will leak urine if they don't find a bathroom right away. If you feel you "gotta go" eight or more times each day and night, or fear urine will leak, you may have OAB.
- Needing to pass urine often, day and night. OAB can wake a person from sleep to pass urine more than once a night.
- Sometimes incontinence, which means you leak urine with the "gotta go" feeling. Some people may leak just a few drops, while others may have a sudden gush.

How is OAB Diagnosed?

To find out if your symptoms are caused by OAB, your health care team will likely:

- Ask about your health history including symptoms, the medicines you take and what you eat and drink during the day.
- Do a physical exam to look for things that could cause symptoms.
- Order tests, as needed. These include a urine test (to make sure you don't have an infection or other problems in your urine).
- Suggest you keep a bladder diary where you write down how often you pass urine and when you leak urine.
- Check for other health issues and factors that may be linked to your symptoms. These include obesity, constipation, sleep apnea, anxiety/depression and smoking.

How is OAB Treated?

Lifestyle Changes. Some changes may include:

- *Limiting caffeine and alcohol*, which may result in your body making more urine.
- *Timed urination.* This means you follow a daily bathroom schedule. Instead of going when you feel the urge, you go at set times during the day. You may try to go every two to four hours, whether you feel you have to or not. The goal is to prevent that urgent feeling and to regain control.
- *Delayed voiding.* This is when you practice waiting before you pass urine, even when you have to go. At first, you wait just a few minutes. Over time, you may be able to wait two to three hours at a time.

Prescription Drugs. There are several drug types that can relax the bladder muscle.



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Bladder Botox® Treatments. Botox® relaxes the muscle of the bladder wall. It can help the bladder muscles from squeezing too much.

Nerve Stimulation. This type of treatment sends electrical pulses to nerves that share the same path for the bladder. In OAB, the nerve signals between your bladder and brain do not communicate correctly. These electrical pulses help the brain and the nerves to the bladder communicate so the bladder can function properly and improve OAB symptoms.

Surgery. Surgery is only used in very rare and serious cases.

Tips for Health Care Visits

It is helpful to bring:

- A list of the prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbs you take.
- A list of your past and current illnesses or injuries.
- A way to take notes about treatments.

Bring a friend or relative. They can help remind you of things you may forget to ask, or remind you of things the health care team said.

Bring up the topic. If your health care team doesn't ask about your OAB symptoms, then bring up the topic yourself. Do it early in the visit so you have time for questions. Tell your health care team about your symptoms and how they impact your daily life.

Ask for a referral. If your symptoms are not getting better with your current treatment, ask for a referral to see a specialist who treats OAB.

Questions to Ask Your Health Care Team

- Are my symptoms from OAB or from something else?
- What tests will I need to find out if I have OAB?
- What could have caused my OAB?
- Can I do anything to prevent OAB symptoms?
- What lifestyle changes should I make?
- Are there any exercises I can do to help?

About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions**.

Disclaimer

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

