



A Guide to Managing Your Overactive Bladder

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Understanding Overactive Bladder

Do you find yourself rushing to the bathroom more than you'd like? Do sudden urges interrupt your daily activities? You may be experiencing overactive bladder (OAB)—a medical condition that affects millions of Americans. While OAB can feel isolating and frustrating, the encouraging news is that effective treatments exist. This guide will help you understand your condition and explore management options.

Recognizing the Symptoms

OAB typically presents with one or more of these signs:

Sudden Urgency

An immediate, urgent need to urinate that feels difficult or impossible to delay. Those with an OAB condition experience this urgency regardless of how often they visited the bathroom.

Frequent Urination

Going to the bathroom more than 8 times per day. For most people, 4-6 visits daily is considered normal. If you're urinating significantly more often than this, it may indicate OAB.

Urge Incontinence

Involuntary urine loss that occurs after a sudden urge to go. This can range from a few drops to a larger amount, and many people find this symptom particularly distressing.

Nocturia

Waking 2 or more times during the night to urinate. Most people can sleep through a full 6-8 hour night without bathroom visits. Frequent nighttime interruptions can significantly affect sleep quality and daytime functioning.

You're Not Alone in This

Millions of American adults experience OAB. It crosses age groups, gender, and backgrounds. While more common as we age, OAB is not an inevitable part of getting older. The important distinction is that while many people experience occasional symptoms, when these patterns become routine and disruptive, that's when seeking medical evaluation becomes valuable.

Common Triggers for Urgency/Leakage

Many people with OAB notice that certain situations, sensations, or activities tend to bring on urgent urges or leakage episodes. Understanding your personal triggers can help you prepare and manage them more effectively.

Sensory Triggers

- Water-related activities (washing hands, hearing running water, being near water sources)
- Visual cues (seeing or thinking about a bathroom)
- Temperature changes (moving from warm to cold environments, such as entering air conditioning)
- Physical sensations (cold air on skin)

Positional Triggers

- Getting out of bed in the morning
- Standing up from sitting
- Transitioning between positions



Environmental Triggers

- Arriving home and unlocking your door
- Entering familiar spaces associated with bathrooms

Emotional Triggers

- Stress and anxiety
- Feeling rushed or worried
- Anticipatory anxiety (worry about having an accident)



How OAB Affects Your Life

Overactive bladder impacts more than just bathroom frequency. It touches every area of your life—from how you spend your day to how you feel about yourself. Without treatment, what starts as an inconvenience can gradually become a significant burden.

Lifestyle Changes and Restrictions

Many people with OAB find themselves making substantial adjustments to their daily routines. Simple tasks become complicated as you mentally map out bathroom locations before leaving home. Social activities you once enjoyed—movies, religious services, sporting events—may be difficult to attend. Short trips by car or public transportation become stressful. Vacations lose their appeal when you're constantly searching for restrooms in unfamiliar places.

Work performance often suffers. Frequent bathroom breaks interrupt productivity and concentration. Some people miss work entirely

due to fear of accidents or health complications related to their condition. Hobbies and interests get abandoned because they feel incompatible with your symptoms.

Coping Strategies That Create New Problems

In an effort to manage symptoms, many people develop patterns that actually make things worse. Obsessively planning bathroom locations—constantly aware of where the nearest restroom is—creates ongoing anxiety. Drastically limiting water intake to reduce urination seems logical but backfires; concentrated urine irritates the bladder further, worsening symptoms. Some people restrict their clothing choices to dark colors year-round, avoiding lighter clothes that might reveal evidence of leakage or incontinence products. The need to carry spare clothing everywhere creates additional stress and embarrassment.

The Emotional and Psychological Weight

Beyond the physical symptoms, OAB carries a significant emotional burden. Many people experience anxiety about potential accidents, embarrassment about their condition, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Social withdrawal often follows—making excuses to avoid gatherings, declining invitations, pulling away from friends and family. Some people feel they've lost their ability to engage naturally in social situations.

Intimate relationships often suffer. Fear of leakage during physical intimacy can lead to avoidance of sexual contact entirely, creating distance in relationships and affecting self-confidence. Sleep disruption from nighttime bathroom trips leaves people irritable, fatigued, and emotionally drained during the day.

Shame frequently accompanies OAB, particularly if leakage occurs. Worry about odor, concerns about staining furniture or clothing, and fear of judgment can lead to complete social isolation. When people keep their condition secret—even from their doctor—they lose the support system that could help them. Depression and hopelessness can develop as quality of life declines and isolation deepens.

Physical Health Consequences

OAB doesn't just affect your mood and daily activities. It carries real physical health risks.

Skin and Infection Problems

Repeated moisture from leakage damages skin's natural protective barrier, creating ideal conditions for bacterial growth. This leads to rashes, skin breakdown, fungal infections, and recurrent urinary tract infections. These infections cause additional discomfort and often require medical treatment.

Fall Risk

Rushing to the bathroom at night, especially in dark or unfamiliar spaces, significantly increases fall risk. For older adults, falls can result in serious fractures requiring surgery and hospitalization. These injuries can lead to complications and sometimes mark a turning point toward loss of independence.

Loss of Independence

In severe cases, when OAB remains untreated or uncontrolled, it becomes a factor in decisions to move to assisted living facilities or nursing homes. What might have been preventable with early treatment can lead to significant life changes.

Taking Action Matters

The progression from minor inconvenience to major life disruption isn't inevitable. Early intervention and proper treatment can prevent symptoms from worsening. If you're experiencing OAB symptoms or notice them in someone you care about, seeking medical evaluation shouldn't be delayed. Effective treatments exist, and most people see meaningful improvement when they take action.



Why People Wait to Seek Help?

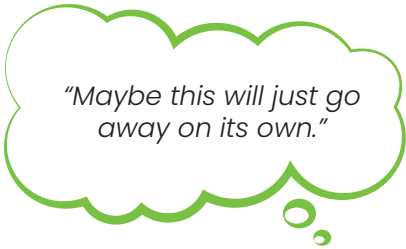
The majority of people experiencing OAB symptoms never get diagnosed or treated. Those who do eventually see a doctor often wait years—sometimes suffering silently for an average of 3 years before seeking help. By that time, symptoms have usually become severe enough that avoiding treatment is no longer possible. But why do people endure such significant suffering for so long before taking action?

While society has become more open about health issues, bladder problems remain deeply personal for many. Social stigma persists, and the association with childhood accidents adds shame. Yet healthcare providers address these concerns regularly and professionally.

"I feel too embarrassed to talk about this with my doctor."

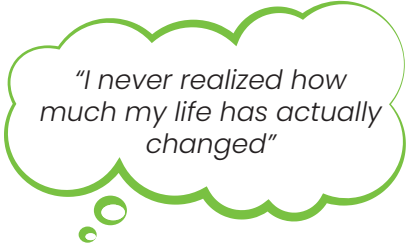
"I don't think anything could actually help."

Many people don't realize OAB is a recognized medical condition with proven treatments. Myths persist—most commonly, the false belief that surgery is the only option. In reality, most cases improve through behavioral changes, exercises, and medications.

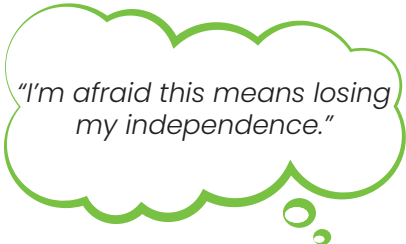


"Maybe this will just go away on its own."

Some notice symptoms but assume they're temporary. With OAB, the condition typically persists or worsens without treatment. Waiting often makes symptoms more entrenched.



"I never realized how much my life has actually changed"



"I'm afraid this means losing my independence."

OAB develops gradually. People adapt incrementally—avoiding activities, changing routines, organizing life around bathrooms. Over time, these changes become so normal that people don't recognize how constrained their life has become.

Some worry that acknowledging bladder problems signals decline or aging. Others fear burdening family members. Rather than seek help, they suffer silently.

Taking the First Step

Understanding why people delay treatment is important. But the truth is: OAB is treatable, most people improve significantly, and early intervention prevents years of unnecessary suffering. Your health and quality of life are worth the brief conversation with your doctor.

Body Basics

Understanding Your Urinary System

Your urinary system is a coordinated network designed to filter waste from your blood and eliminate it from your body as urine. For this system to work effectively, your brain, nerves, muscles, and organs must all communicate and function together seamlessly.

Your Brain, Spinal Cord, and Nervous System

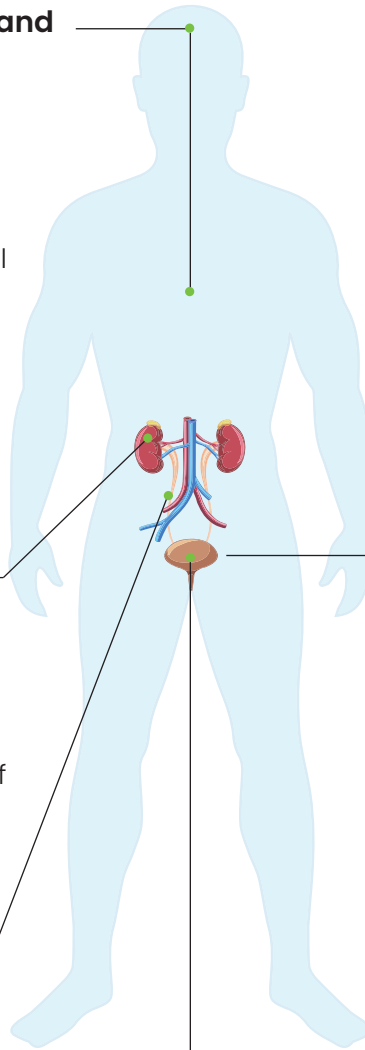
Your brain is the command center, coordinating all urinary functions. Signals travel back and forth between your brain and bladder through your spinal cord and nerve pathways. These nerves alert your brain when your bladder is filling and carry signals back telling your bladder when to hold urine or release it.

Your Kidneys

These two vital organs filter your blood continuously, removing waste products and excess water. Each day, your kidneys process approximately 40 gallons of blood and produce about 1.5 quarts of urine (which is 95% water and 5% waste).

Your Ureters

These two tubes work like delivery channels, continuously transporting urine from your kidneys to your bladder. They use muscle contractions and gravity to move urine downward.



Your Bladder

This muscular storage organ holds urine until you're ready to empty it. Think of it like a balloon—it expands as it fills and contracts when it's time to release urine.

Your Detrusor Muscle

Located in your bladder wall, this powerful muscle contracts during urination to squeeze urine out of your bladder and into the urethra.

Your Urethra

This tube carries urine from your bladder out of your body.

Your Pelvic Floor Muscles

This network of interconnected muscles supports your bladder, urethra, and other pelvic organs, keeping them in proper position and helping maintain continence.

The Sphincter

Part of your pelvic floor system, this muscle acts like a valve encircling the urethra. You control it consciously—tightening it to hold urine in and relaxing it when you're ready to urinate.

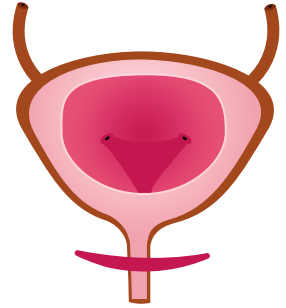
Understanding Normal Bladder Function

For most people, urination is an automatic process that requires little conscious thought. It's actually a sophisticated coordination between your brain, nerves, and muscles working together to store urine safely and release it at appropriate times.

Step 1

Bladder at Rest

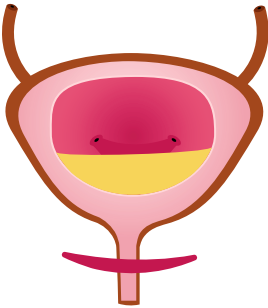
Your detrusor muscle is relaxed and your pelvic floor muscles are gently contracted, holding everything in place. Your bladder is empty and ready to receive and store urine.



Step 2

First Signal

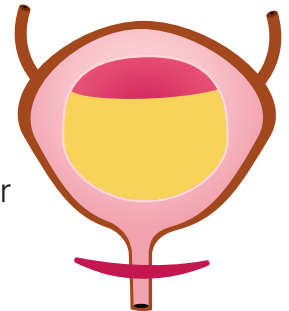
As your bladder fills with urine over several hours, your nerves send a message to your brain that your bladder is becoming full. You feel the initial urge to urinate, but your body can delay this if needed.



Step 3

Ready to Release

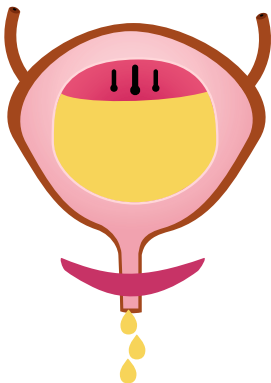
When you decide it's the right time to urinate, your brain sends the signal. Your pelvic floor muscles begin to relax, preparing to allow urine to pass through.



Step 4

Emptying

Your detrusor muscle contracts, squeezing urine out of your bladder. Your pelvic floor muscles fully relax, allowing urine to flow freely through the urethra and out of your body. The process is complete.



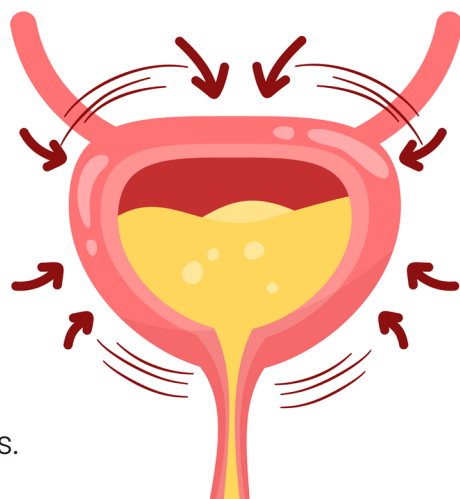
When Your bladder Overreacts

With overactive bladder, your detrusor muscle misbehaves—contracting far more frequently than it should and at times when it shouldn't. While medical experts understand the mechanics of what happens in your body, the underlying reasons why OAB develops remain not fully understood.

How OAB Changes Normal Function

Unpredictable Muscle Behavior

Your detrusor muscle begins acting erratically. It squeezes without warning, even when your bladder contains only a small amount of urine. These contractions happen involuntarily—they're difficult or impossible to control or stop. Most problematically, they occur far more often than your bladder actually needs to empty, creating frequent urgent urges.



Faulty Communication

Normally, your bladder fills gradually, sending gentle signals to your brain. With OAB, this system breaks down. Instead of receiving gradual warning messages, your brain sends sudden, incorrect signals telling your detrusor muscle to contract immediately—even when your bladder isn't full. The result is intense urgency, that overwhelming need to urinate right now. If you can't reach a bathroom quickly enough to suppress the urge, leakage occurs.

What Triggers These Incorrect Signals?

Sometimes OAB develops as a result of specific medical conditions affecting the nerves or muscles controlling your urinary tract. Disease or dysfunction of the nervous system can disrupt communication between your brain and bladder. Pelvic floor muscles that are weak, damaged, or not functioning properly can contribute to symptoms.

What Increases Your Risk

Several factors can increase the likelihood of developing OAB. Some are temporary (like urinary tract infections that resolve with treatment), while others are permanent or long-term. Understanding which factors may apply to you can help you discuss your condition with your doctor.

Age Related Factors

More than half of people with OAB are over 65. As we age, our nervous system changes can affect how well we coordinate bladder function. Pelvic organs may shift position over time, and older adults experience more frequent urinary tract infections due to weaker immune systems—all of which can trigger OAB symptoms.

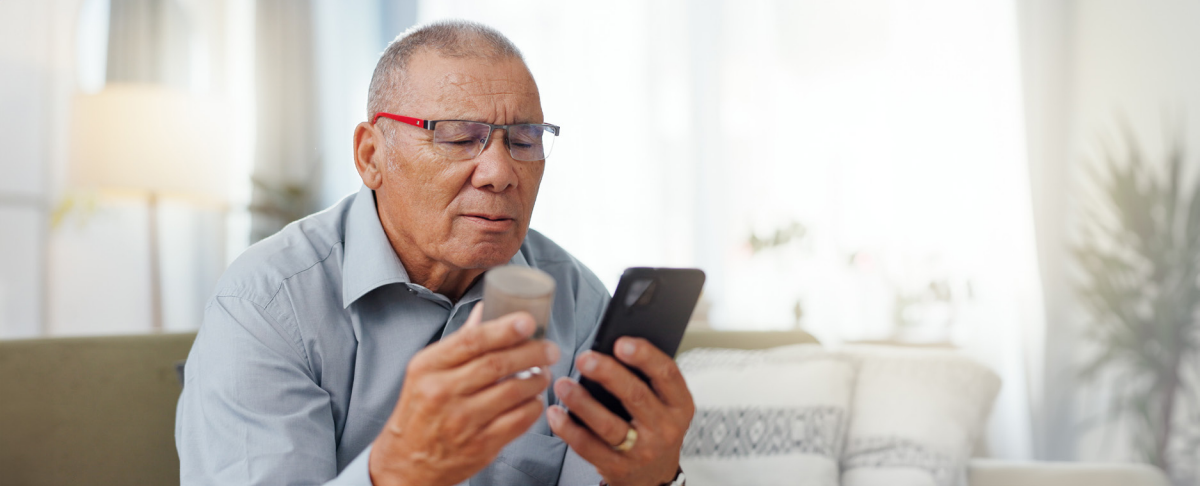


Pregnancy and Childbirth

During pregnancy, increased blood volume means more frequent urination. Vaginal delivery can stretch and damage pelvic nerves and muscles, potentially leading to long-term bladder issues.

Menopause

When estrogen levels drop after menopause, bladder and pelvic floor tissues become thinner and weaker, making them more vulnerable to irritation and dysfunction.



Medications

Certain medications can contribute to OAB-like symptoms. Diuretics increase urine production. Sedatives, antidepressants, painkillers, and sleep aids can dull your awareness of the need to urinate or interfere with bladder nerve signals. If you're taking multiple medications, discuss potential side effects with your doctor.

Neurological Conditions

Diseases affecting your nervous system—multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, stroke, or uncontrolled diabetes—can disrupt communication between your brain and bladder, affecting both sensation and control.

Pelvic Procedures

Pelvic surgery (hysterectomy, prostate procedures) or radiation therapy can damage delicate nerves and muscles, sometimes causing OAB symptoms months or years later.

Other Contributing Factors

- Enlarged Prostate
- Urinary Tract Infections (UTI)
- Bladder Cancer Treatment
- Extra Weight
- Job Demands

Other Bladder and Urinary Conditions

It's possible to experience more than one type of urinary problem simultaneously. Your doctor will evaluate each condition separately to create an appropriate treatment plan for you.

Different Types of Incontinence

Stress Incontinence

Some people leak urine during physical activities or sudden movements—sneezing, coughing, laughing, lifting, standing up, exercising, or changing positions. This happens because physical movement puts pressure on the bladder, and if your sphincter muscles aren't strong enough, urine escapes. This is different from OAB and requires a different treatment approach.

Mixed Incontinence

If you experience both sudden urgent leakage (from OAB) and leakage during physical activity (stress incontinence), you have what's called mixed incontinence. This combination is quite common and your doctor can address both components of your condition.

Symptoms That Need Further Evaluation

The following symptoms are not typical of OAB and may indicate other medical conditions requiring diagnosis and treatment. Be sure to mention them to your doctor:

- Pain or discomfort in your pelvic area or bladder
- Burning sensation during urination
- Blood in your urine
- Feeling like your bladder doesn't completely empty
- Difficulty starting your urine stream, dribbling, straining, or inability to urinate
- Pain during sexual intercourse

Your doctor will determine whether these symptoms represent a separate condition that needs specific treatment or are related to your OAB management.

Recognizing Your Symptoms

Do you experience any of these? This checklist can help you prepare for a conversation with your doctor.

Check All That Apply to You



Frequency and Flow

- ☐ I find myself in the bathroom much more often than I used to
- ☐ It seems like I need to urinate very soon after drinking
- ☐ My bathroom visits are affecting my daily activities and plans

Sudden Urges

- ☐ I experience sudden, urgent needs to urinate even if I just went
- ☐ The urge strikes even when I've only had a small amount to drink
- ☐ When I do go, sometimes very little urine comes out
- ☐ I worry I won't reach a bathroom in time when an urge hits

Activity Avoidance

- ☐ I skip or avoid activities because I'm not sure bathrooms will be available
- ☐ I decline social invitations due to concerns about having an accident
- ☐ I limit travel or outings because of my symptoms

Preventive Bathroom Visits

- ☐ I use the bathroom whenever I see one, even if I don't feel an urgent need
- ☐ I do this to avoid accidents or potential embarrassment
- ☐ I worry about not finding a bathroom if I don't go "just in case"

Leakage Incidents

- ☐ I experience urine leakage without any warning
- ☐ I have accidents when I can't get to the bathroom fast enough

Lifestyle Adjustments

- ☐ I drink less fluid throughout the day to reduce bathroom visits
- ☐ I wear protective pads or carry extra clothing when I leave home
- ☐ I avoid intimate activities due to fear of leakage
- ☐ I wake multiple times at night to urinate, leaving me tired the next day

Next Steps

If you checked several of these boxes, consider scheduling an appointment with your doctor. Bring this checklist with you—it will help your doctor understand your symptoms and create an appropriate treatment plan for you.

Remember: What you're experiencing is common, treatable, and nothing to be embarrassed about. Your doctor is there to help.



Take Control!

Your life doesn't have to revolve around OAB. Take the first step toward managing your symptoms and reclaiming your freedom. Help is available, and improvement is possible.

Talk With Your Healthcare Team

Your doctor and healthcare providers want to help you manage OAB effectively. Success comes from working together as a team—your honesty and commitment combined with their expertise and support create the foundation for meaningful improvement.

Finding the Right Care

Many primary care doctors now routinely ask about bladder health during exams. If yours hasn't, bring it up yourself. Your primary care physician may be able to manage your OAB, or they may refer you to a specialist. Several types of healthcare professionals are trained to diagnose and treat OAB:

- **Primary Care Physician (PCP)/Family Doctor:** Provides general medical care and can often manage OAB
- **Internist:** Specializes in general medical care for adults
- **Geriatrician:** Specializes in healthcare for older adults
- **Urologist:** Specializes in urinary tract disorders
- **Gynecologist/Urogynecologist:** Women's health specialists; urogynecologists have additional training in bladder disorders
- **Nurse Practitioner or Physician's Assistant:** Certified to diagnose and prescribe treatment; may specialize in OAB

Preparing For Your Appointment

Complete the checklist on page 15. It will give your doctor insight into the symptoms you are dealing with.

Fill out the bladder tracker on page 20. It will provide valuable information about the severity of your condition.

Write down your symptoms, medications, and any questions you have on page 23 so you don't forget anything.

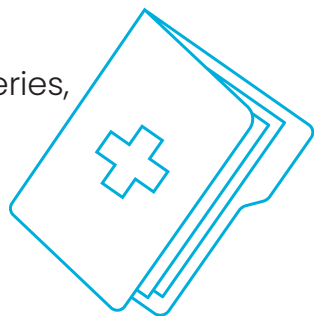
Having the Conversation

For many people, discussing bladder problems feels uncomfortable or embarrassing—even with their doctor. But this conversation is essential. Until now, you may have been managing OAB alone, adapting your life around your symptoms. Treatment can change that. Your doctor has heard these concerns many times and approaches them professionally and compassionately. Share openly, including details that feel private. Ask questions when you have them. Your healthcare team is there to support you.

What Your Doctor Will Evaluate

Your Symptom Pattern: When did symptoms start? Which bother you most? Do they follow a pattern throughout the day? Your doctor will also ask about bowel habits, changes in sexual activity, and whether you use protective products.

Your Medical History: Previous bladder treatments, pelvic or prostate surgeries, pregnancies and deliveries, injuries or accidents, and all medications you take (including over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and supplements).



Physical Examination: Your doctor performs a general physical exam and checks your abdomen. For women, a pelvic exam is typically included; for men, a genital and prostate exam. Your doctor also checks for neurological conditions that might affect bladder function.

Laboratory Tests: A urine sample checks for infection or other problems. Your doctor may also check your blood sugar to rule out diabetes, which can contribute to OAB symptoms.

Specialized Testing (if needed): Your doctor may refer you for ultrasound (creating images of your urinary system) or urodynamic testing (measuring how well your bladder and sphincter function). While urodynamic testing may feel slightly uncomfortable, it is not painful.

Understanding Your Patterns

Keeping a record of your daily urination habits provides your doctor with valuable information about your OAB—how it affects your routines, social life, and overall well-being—and helps them create the most effective treatment plan for you. Beyond helping your doctor, tracking your patterns can actually reveal insights about your own condition. When you pay attention to your habits and behaviors, you often discover patterns and triggers you hadn't noticed before. Identifying what makes your symptoms worse allows you to make changes that can significantly reduce your symptoms.

What To Record

Column 1 – Fluid Intake: Document everything you drink (water, coffee, tea, soda, juice, etc.) and the approximate amount for each time period.

Column 2 – Urination Frequency: Mark each time you urinate during the time period, even if only a small amount passes.

Column 3 – Urgent Urges: Note when you experience a strong urge to urinate—times when you feel compelled to rush to the bathroom.

Column 4 – Urge Triggers: Record what you were doing when the urgent urge occurred. Were you washing dishes? Hearing running water? Experiencing stress? Noting activities can help identify your personal triggers.

Column 5 – Leakage Episodes: Document any accidents and their size (small: a few drops; large: soaking through to outer clothing).

Column 6 – Leakage Context: Note what was happening when leakage occurred. Were you laughing, coughing, exercising, or experiencing an urgent urge? This helps identify whether your leakage is stress-related, urgency-related, or both.

Day 1

Time	Fluid Intake	Urination Frequency	Urgent Urges	Urge Triggers	Leakage Episodes	Leakage Context
6am to 8am						
8am to 10am						
10am to 12pm						
12pm to 2pm						
2pm to 4pm						
4pm to 6pm						
6pm to 8pm						
8pm to 10pm						
10pm to 12am						
12am to 2am						
2am to 4am						
4am to 6am						

Day 2

Time	Fluid Intake	Urination Frequency	Urgent Urges	Urge Triggers	Leakage Episodes	Leakage Context
6am to 8am						
8am to 10am						
10am to 12pm						
12pm to 2pm						
2pm to 4pm						
4pm to 6pm						
6pm to 8pm						
8pm to 10pm						
10pm to 12am						
12am to 2am						
2am to 4am						
4am to 6am						

Day 3

Time	Fluid Intake	Urination Frequency	Urgent Urges	Urge Triggers	Leakage Episodes	Leakage Context
6am to 8am						
8am to 10am						
10am to 12pm						
12pm to 2pm						
2pm to 4pm						
4pm to 6pm						
6pm to 8pm						
8pm to 10pm						
10pm to 12am						
12am to 2am						
2am to 4am						
4am to 6am						

Your Path Forward

You now have the knowledge and tools to take control of your OAB. With commitment to your treatment plan, close collaboration with your healthcare team, and belief in your ability to improve, managing your symptoms is absolutely achievable. The steps you take today set you on the road toward better health, greater confidence, and renewed freedom.

Use this section to organize your thoughts before meeting with your doctor. Having these notes prepared helps you make the most of your appointment time and ensures you don't forget important questions.

Note Your Symptoms

Which symptoms are you experiencing?

- ☐ Sudden, urgent need to urinate
- ☐ Frequent bathroom visits
- ☐ Unexpected leakage after urgency
- ☐ Waking multiple times at night

How are these symptoms affecting your daily life?

List all current medications (prescriptions, vitamins, supplements)

During Your Appointment – Questions to Ask

What do you think is causing my symptoms?

What treatment options are available for my situation?

Which treatment do you recommend and why?

What are the pros and cons of this treatment?

What are the side effects of this treatment?

What results will I see from this treatment?

Are there any side effects?

Additional thoughts or concerns.



We're Here to Support You

eternalHealth Member Benefit

Kaia Health – Personalized Pelvic Floor Support

Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles is one of the most effective ways to reduce OAB symptoms. Kaia Health is a digital therapy app available to eternalHealth members at no cost, that provides personalized guidance for pelvic floor exercises, balance improvement, and fall prevention. Through the app, you receive:

- Personalized coaching tailored to your specific condition
- 1:1 support from certified health coaches
- Step-by-step guidance through pelvic floor exercises
- Educational content about pelvic health
- Progress tracking to monitor your improvement

Kaia Health complements the exercises discussed in this guide, providing expert instruction and accountability to help you get the most benefit from your efforts.

How to Access:

Visit startkaia.com/eternalHealth to learn more about this benefit and how to get started. If you have any questions or need assistance please reach out to support@kaiahealth.com or visit their help page at help.kaiahealth.com.

Get the Help You Need

Managing overactive bladder is a journey, and you don't have to navigate it alone. The eternalHealth Care Management team is here to answer your questions, address your concerns, and provide the support you need every step of the way.

Contact the eternalHealth Care Management Team:

Phone: 1-800-787-5076 (TTY 711)

Hours: 9am to 5pm EST, Monday to Friday

Additional Resources and Information

For more educational materials and wellness resources visit: eternalHealth.com/HealthyYou



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