

Diagnosing and managing bladder problems in MS

When MS disrupts nervous system messages between the brain and the spinal cord problems with bladder function can occur:

- **Problems storing urine** (bladder overactivity) occurs when frequent bladder contractions occur with small amounts of urine and provoke symptoms of urgency, frequency and sometimes loss of control. Getting up at night can occur.
- **Problems emptying urine** occur when the nervous system signal to empty the bladder does not occur and the bladder fills too much. This can cause urgency, frequency and loss of control. Bladder infections may occur. Incomplete emptying of the bladder may also occur, causing frequent trips to the bathroom.
- **A combination of bladder overactivity and emptying problems**

Diagnosing the Problem – Because the symptoms can be similar, testing is needed to determine the type of bladder problem so that appropriate treatment can be given.

- A thorough history is taken to better understand the bladder problem
- A urine sample is obtained to check for infection.
- A bladder ultrasound may be done to identify any urine retained after a trip to the bathroom – a signal that the person is not able to empty the bladder fully
- Urodynamic studies are done when a more comprehensive assessment is needed

Treating the Problem – Treatments vary with the type of problem the person is having.

- **Storage problems** can be treated through lifestyle changes including adequate fluid intake and avoidance of bladder irritants such as caffeine and alcohol. Medications can reduce bladder overactivity, and other treatments such as botulinum toxin bladder injections, pelvic floor physical therapy and stimulation of a nerve in the lower leg may also be used.
- **Emptying problems** can be treated with medication and/or intermittent self-catheterization (ISC), a procedure to empty the bladder through a small thin tube passed through the urethra and into the bladder
- * A combined storage and emptying problem requires a combination of these strategies.



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Maintaining a Healthy Urinary System - Promptly treating bladder infections is very important and can help avoid serious kidney complications and can improve a person's quality of life. It is important to:

- Empty the bladder as completely as possible, with ISC, if needed
- Drink adequate fluids – approximately 6-8 glasses per day
- Keep the urine acidic by increasing protein, cranberries and plums, and limit citrus fruits, juices, milk products, beverages of antacids with sodium carbonate or sodium bicarbonate, and potatoes
- Report abrupt changes in MS symptoms – such as cognitive change, weakness, increased stiffness and increased fatigue - as well as changes in bladder function such as new urgency, frequency or loss of control promptly to your PCP or neurologist

This information is made possible through a collaboration between the VA MS Centers of Excellence and the National MS Society, www.nationalmssociety.org