

ALL ABOUT BLADDER ISSUES



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Many women find that as they get older, and especially after the menopause due to the effect of a decline in hormone levels, they start to get bladder symptoms. These can include needing to go to the toilet more frequently, more urgently, leaking urine under various circumstances and experiencing more episodes of urinary tract infections (UTIs or cystitis). Lack of oestrogen leads to a reduction of mucous production and thinning of the vaginal tissues, as well as a change in vaginal pH which suppresses the 'good bacteria' that keep the harmful bacteria in check. This can lead to more infections, as well as a general feeling of irritability and discomfort. Weakening of the pelvic floor due to loss of muscle tone and elasticity can increase the chance of leaking when coughing, sneezing or jumping etc, as well as the risk of developing a prolapse that could further affect bladder function.

Pelvic floor strengthening exercises are therefore very important, as is maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle. You should drink plenty of fluids but avoid substances that could be irritating to the bladder such as caffeine, alcohol and fizzy drinks. Empty your bladder as fully as possible when you go to the toilet, but try to avoid going too often to pass only tiny amounts.

We know that targeted, local vaginal oestrogen replacement, sometimes in addition to systemic HRT, can be very helpful for its positive effect on calming the bladder and in protecting against recurrent UTIs. Other medications that can be prescribed include low dose antibiotics or Hiprex to try and prevent infections, or drugs that reduce bladder contractions to help with symptoms of urgency and leaking when you cannot hold on long enough.

Sometimes women need to see a Urogynaecologist for a detailed assessment of bladder function and to explore a wider range of treatment options including surgery.

Both Dr Katie Barber and Dr Helen Kennedy have experience of working alongside consultants in a Urogynaecology clinic, and can assess your symptoms in order to provide the best advice.

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