

Information for Patients



Bladder Pain



Bladder pain is a long-term bladder condition that causes discomfort or pain in your bladder and pelvic areas.

- It is more common in women than men.
- Symptoms can range from mild discomfort to severe pain. You may feel pressure, discomfort or pain in your bladder and this may get worse as your bladder fills up.
- You may feel an urgent need to pass urine, and you may need to pass urine frequently during the day and night.
- You may have pain during sex.

Treatment aims to relieve symptoms rather than achieve a cure and there are things you can do to help.

What causes Bladder Pain?

We often don't know the cause of bladder pain. Some people have symptom flares (when their symptoms get worse) in response to things which can include:

- stress
- having sex
- menstruating
- urinary tract infection
- taking certain medicines or forgetting to take medicines
- some foods or drinks.

Foods that may make your symptoms worse include:

- citrus fruits, tomatoes and juices
 - chocolate
 - coffee and caffeinated drinks
 - alcohol
 - spicy or acidic foods
 - carbonated drinks (sodas)
 - artificial sweeteners
 - preserved and processed foods, such as packaged meats.
 - Medications /medical history
 - Bowel function/ constipation
 - Fluid intake – amount and type of fluid
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How is Bladder Pain diagnosed?

There's no single test to diagnose bladder pain. The first step is to exclude other conditions that can cause bladder pain.

- Bladder diary – to record how much and what you drink. How frequently you go to the toilet day and night and how much urine you pass when you go to the toilet.
- Urine sample – to check for urine infection or see if the urine contains a lot of red or white blood cells
- Cystoscopy – where a small telescope is used to look inside your bladder. This is an important step to exclude cancer and to also look for inflammation or ulceration in your bladder.
- Urodynamic testing - to test the function of your bladder and urethra. Does your bladder store urine properly? When you pass urine does your bladder work properly?
- Imaging – to make sure your anatomy and organs are normal.

How is Bladder Pain treated?

There's no single treatment that works for everyone with bladder pain. Treatment aims to relieve your symptoms, and it may take weeks to months before your symptoms improve.

Your urologist will create a treatment plan for you that may include some of the approaches described below. You may need a combination of these and, even then, your symptoms may come and go. However, over time you should be able to find treatments that give you relief and help you cope with your bladder pain



CONSERVATIVE AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Bladder retraining

If going to the toilet frequently is a problem for you, then you may be able to train yourself to hold your urine for longer periods so that you can gradually increase the times between bathroom visits.

Bowels

If you are having problems with your bowel such as constipation, urgency or leaking, this can worsen bladder symptoms. Some people find their bladder pain symptoms improve if they have good bowel habits.

Physiotherapy

Bladder pain can be caused by tightness and trigger points in the pelvic floor. It is very important to relax the pelvic floor to pass urine. Women carry a lot of tension in the pelvic floor and can have trouble relaxing these muscles. If you have pain in your bladder your pelvic floor muscles can get tight and knotted. A physiotherapist can work with you to stretch these muscles and teach you how to keep them relaxed.

Do you need to see a gynaecologist?

If you think your symptoms are triggered by menstruation or related to your cycle, seeing a gynaecologist is a good idea. Hormones effect bladder pain in some women.

Counselling

Trauma and stress can cause or worsen bladder pain. A history of birth trauma, rape, sexual abuse or other trauma can cause bladder pain. Periods of stress in our personal lives and at work can cause or worsen bladder pain. Working with a psychologist can help.

Self-care

Keep a food diary and avoid any foods or drinks that trigger your symptoms.

- Try an elimination diet. This is where you stop eating foods that could trigger your symptoms and then reintroduce each food one by one and note whether your symptoms return.
- Keep well hydrated by drinking enough water.
- Avoid smoking. The chemicals in cigarettes can irritate your bladder, and even if smoking doesn't trigger your symptoms, it's a major cause of bladder cancer so stopping smoking is a good decision.
- Be active. Even easy activities like walking or gentle stretching can help relieve symptoms.
- Try relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness, as stress can trigger symptoms in some people.

- Put an icepack or heat pad on your lower tummy or between your legs.
- Relax your pelvic floor muscles by squatting with your legs wide apart.
- Try the 'happy baby' yoga pose. Lie on your back, press your knees against your chest, point the bottoms of your feet towards the ceiling and grab the outsides of your feet.
- Avoid tight clothes that press on your tummy.
- If sex makes your symptoms worse, you can take pain killers beforehand and use lubricants during sex to reduce discomfort.

MEDICINES

Ural

Ural is a fast-acting urinary alkaliser designed to relieve stinging, burning, and pain by neutralizing the acid in your urine. It makes urination less uncomfortable and is typically taken as an effervescent powder dissolved in water, up to four times daily.

Phenazopyridine hydrochloride (AZO urinary pain relief)

This medicine can help relieve bladder pain, burning, and urgency. It is a fast-acting urinary pain reliever that can be used during a pain flare. It is not a prescription medicine and is only available to buy online.

Ovestin cream

Ovestin is a prescription hormone replacement designed to treat vaginal dryness, burning and itching caused by menopause. It works by restoring oestrogen to the tissues of the urethra and bladder base which strengthens these areas, lowers vaginal pH and reduces irritation.

Nerve modulating medications

Chronic pain is often caused by nerves that are misfiring. The pain you are experiencing is real, but the nerves are broken and sending the signal of pain to your brain without an underlying trigger present. Medications that help turn off nerves that cause pain include amitriptyline, nortriptyline, gabapentin and pregabalin. For these medications to be effective they need to be taken regularly for at least several weeks.

Frequency and urgency medications

Solifenacin treats urinary urgency, frequency and incontinence. It works by relaxing the bladder muscles to reduce spasms and increase capacity.

Mirabegron treats sudden urges to pass urine, frequency and leakage. It relaxes the bladder muscle allowing it to hold more urine. This is not funded and is expensive.

BLADDER PROCEDURES

Bladder instillation where medicines, such as dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), steroids, anti-inflammatory or a numbing medicine, are placed into your bladder through a thin tube called a catheter

Hydrodistension where your bladder is filled with water and stretched. This is done under anaesthetic in the operating theatre. This may temporarily relieve symptoms.

Botulinum toxin (Botox) injections into the bladder. Botox relaxes the bladder muscle and can be very effective in treating urgency and frequency symptoms. It is less effective in treating pain. This is done in clinic or in the operating theatre.

Neuromodulation therapy which uses harmless electrical impulses to change how the nerves going to and from your bladder work.

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) uses little pads placed on your ankle to send electrical impulses up to your spinal cord and the nerves that control your bladder.

Sacral Nerve Stimulation uses a pacemaker that is placed in your body just above your bottom with a wire that goes directly to the nerves for your bladder.

CHRONIC PAIN RESOURCES

- Explain Pain 2nd edition, by David Butler
- Tame the Beast
- TEDxAdelaide - Lorimer Moseley - Why Things Hurt
- Curable: A Different Approach to Chronic Pain
- Home - painHEALTH
- paintrainer.org/login-to-paintrainer/
- Free Online Psychological Treatment | eCentreClinic | Macquarie University
- Pelvic Pain Foundation | Enhance Knowledge, Support Patients
- Home - Live Well with Pain
- Welcome to Australis Specialist Pain Clinic | Pain Management Services | Rehabilitation
- Home | Retrain Pain
- NZ Painful Bladder Support Group - Home
- Ella Health | pelvic pain education
- Online Treatment for Chronic Pain | MindSpot

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