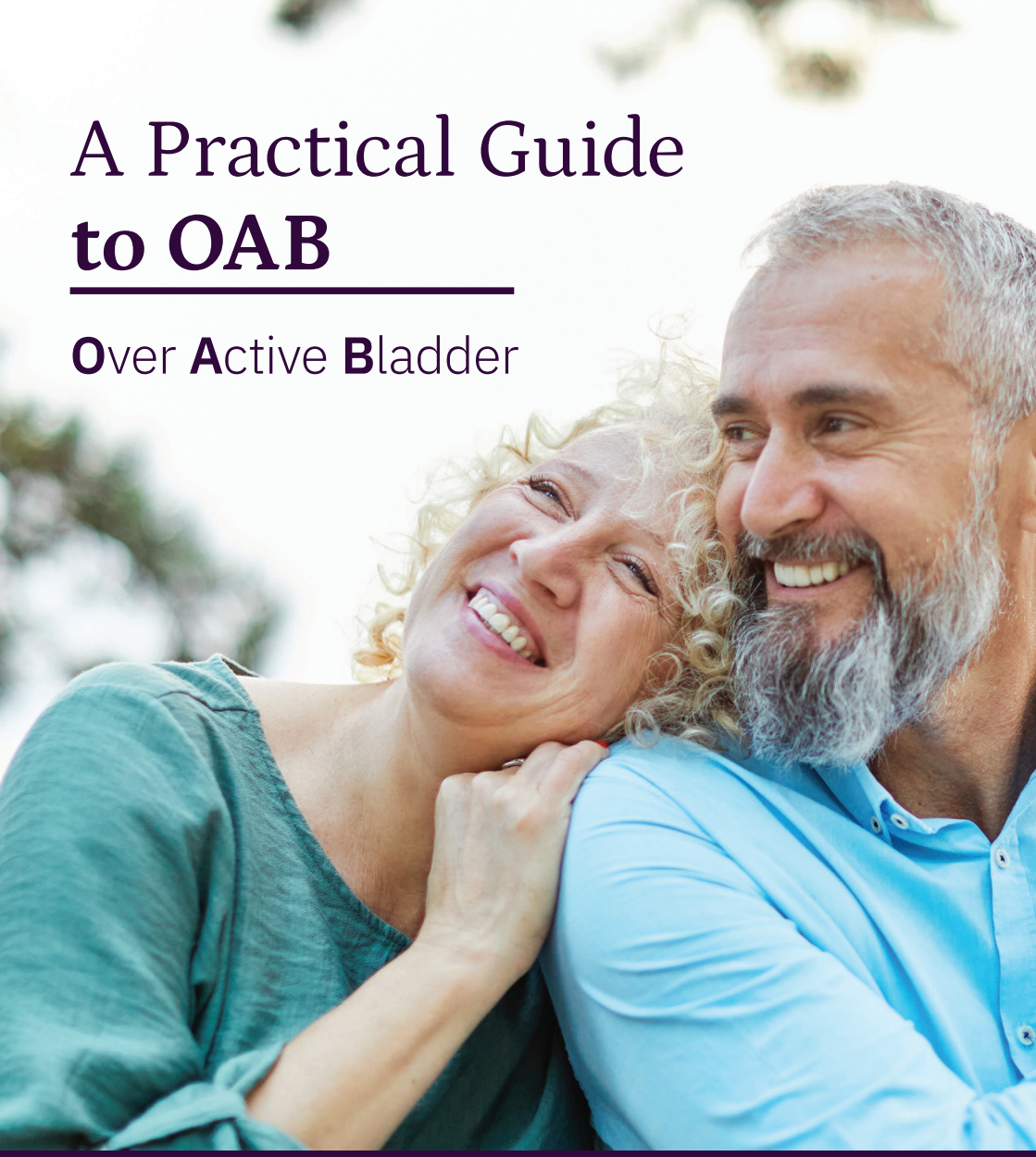
A Practical Guide **to OAB**

Over **A**ctive **B**ladder



Visit **www.needtopee.ie**
for further support and information

NeedToPee.ie

astellas

What is Overactive Bladder?

Overactive bladder (OAB) is a medical problem that affects the way your bladder behaves. OAB is an involuntary and sudden contraction or squeezing of the muscle in the wall of the bladder.

In people with overactive bladder, the bladder muscles seem to give wrong messages to the brain, causing the bladder to contract more often than it should, even when it only contains a small amount of urine, and not always when you want it to. In effect, you have much less control over when your bladder contracts to pass urine.

These involuntary contractions give rise to the symptoms associated with OAB such as urgently needing to pass urine, frequently needing to go to the toilet (eight or more times a day, or two or more times a night), and in some cases accidental leakage of urine because of not getting to the toilet in time.

OAB is more common than you realise. About 16% of the Irish population or approximately 350,000 Irish people may be affected by OAB[1]. It is a condition that affects both men and women of all ages and can have a huge impact on your quality of life.

Some people who suffer from overactive bladder are “OAB dry” – they feel an urgent need to urinate and may make frequent trips to use the toilet, but they are able to make it to the bathroom in time. However, some people with OAB may accidentally leak urine, which is called urge incontinence.

16%

of the Irish population over the age of **40** may be affected by **OAB**[1]

Affects **men and women** of all ages

significantly **impacts** quality of life

Symptoms and **diagnosis of OAB**

If you have an overactive bladder (OAB) you may experience a frequent, intense and urgent need to urinate. In some cases, it is so sudden that you have trouble making it to the bathroom in time.

SYMPTOMS:[2]

OAB is caused by involuntary bladder contractions and is characterised by a group of four symptoms:

Urgency: The most common symptom of overactive bladder is urinary urgency, which is a sudden and compelling desire to pass urine.

Frequency: If you have an overactive bladder you may be visiting the bathroom to urinate 8 or more times in a 24-hour period.

Nocturia: Nocturia is defined as waking up two or more times a night to urinate. Most people can sleep for 6-8 hours without having to urinate.

Urge incontinence: OAB can have symptoms of urinary incontinence. This happens because the sense of needing to empty your bladder is so overwhelming that there may be some accidental loss of urine before you reach the toilet.

GETTING HELP

OAB can turn a person's world upside down but can be managed with the appropriate treatment. You should talk to your GP to determine whether the symptoms you are experiencing are due to overactive bladder or another condition, and decide which treatment is the best.

DIAGNOSIS:

You might feel embarrassed discussing such a private matter with your doctor, but it's worthwhile to take that step and seek help, particularly if your symptoms are disrupting your daily activities. A diagnosis of overactive bladder (OAB) is based on the person's signs and symptoms and by ruling out other possible causes such as an infection.

The more information you have for the doctor about your symptoms, the more straightforward it will be to make a diagnosis.

You may be asked to answer questions about patterns of passing urine; daily fluid intake; if you are taking any medications and/or supplements that might be making your symptoms worse and to discuss any medical conditions you may have. Your doctor may also ask you if your symptoms are causing you embarrassment or any inconvenience. It maybe suggested that you keep a bladder diary of your bathroom trips.

The doctor may also perform a urinalysis, which is a simple test that can help find the cause of symptoms by checking a sample of urine for glucose, blood or infection.

A minority of people may require referral to a specialist for further tests.

These may include urodynamic testing, which is usually carried out as an outpatient procedure in a hospital. Urodynamic testing may involve measuring the pressure inside the bladder while the bladder is being filled. It can assess the bladder's ability to hold urine and empty steadily and completely and also whether the bladder is having involuntary contractions that cause urine leakage.

How does the **bladder work?**

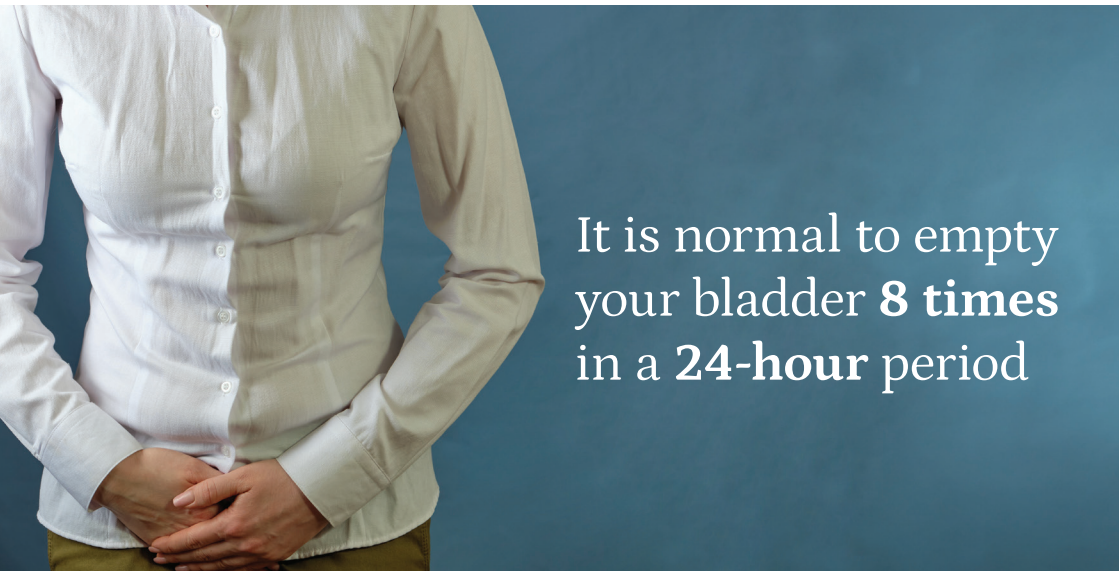
A trickle of urine is constantly passing from the kidneys to the bladder down the ureters (thin tubes of muscle that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder).

The bladder is a hollow, balloon-shaped muscular organ that is responsible for storing urine until you find an appropriate time and place to urinate. It swells into a round shape when it is full and gets smaller as it empties. A healthy bladder can hold up to 300-500ml of urine comfortably. The urethra is the tube that allows urine to pass from the bladder out of the body.

A number of muscles work together like a dam, keeping urine in the bladder between trips to the bathroom. The opening and closing of the urethra is controlled with the help of sphincter muscles. The bladder is supported by the pelvic floor muscles (described as being shaped like a hammock or sling), which help prevent accidental leaks.

Nerves in the bladder tell you when it is time to empty your bladder.

As your bladder fills and reaches its limit, nerve signals are sent to the brain and your urge to urinate intensifies. When you go to the toilet to pass urine, the brain signals the muscular bladder wall to tighten, squeezing urine out of the bladder. At the same time, the brain signals the sphincter and pelvic floor muscles to relax.



Maintaining a **healthy bladder**

There are several things that you should and shouldn't do to maintain a healthy bladder:

- You shouldn't restrict your fluids because you're worried about going to the toilet too often. This can cause your urine to become concentrated, which can irritate your bladder and make your symptoms worse. It's important to drink normal amounts throughout the day – usually 6-8 glasses. It's a good idea to avoid or cut back on caffeinated or fizzy drinks and alcohol as these drinks can also irritate the bladder.
- Some foods can worsen bladder problems, such as chocolate (a source of caffeine), spicy foods or acidic foods like tomatoes and citrus fruits and so should be avoided.
- Constipation can place added pressure on the bladder so stay regular by eating a diet rich in fruit and fibre.
- Another factor that can aggravate OAB is fear of leaking. When you feel anxious, stop and take a few slow deep breaths until the feeling eases.
- Being overweight or smoking can also aggravate your OAB symptoms.
- Avoid urinary tract infections (UTIs), which can provoke OAB symptoms, by drinking plenty of liquids, emptying your bladder regularly and wiping from front to back after using the bathroom.

Drink **6-8 glasses** a day, water or fruit juice. Avoid caffeinated, fizzy drinks or alcohol.

Practical **tips**

Living with an overactive bladder (OAB) can be challenging but you're not alone. Family members, friends, healthcare professionals and other OAB sufferers can prove a rich source of support and ideas. With help and a little planning you can successfully manage your OAB symptoms at home or away. Here are a few tips to help you cope with some of the day-to-day challenges:

Out and about

- If you're planning a shopping trip or going to a restaurant, limit your liquid intake a few hours beforehand and check bathroom locations as soon as you arrive.

Ground travel

- Book your train or bus ticket ahead of time and reserve a seat close to the toilet.
- If you're travelling by car then make a note of where the service stations are.

Be motivated

Many people feel that setting goals helps improve their bladder symptoms

Practical **tips**

Air travel
- When you're booking your airline ticket, try to book an aisle seat near a toilet.
- Check in online and print off your boarding pass to avoid long queues at the airport.

Holiday checklist
- If you're taking medication for your overactive bladder, make sure you have enough medication with you for the duration of your trip away.
- Remember to bring absorbent pads with you, both for convenience and in case you can't find them at your destination.

OAB at work
- Put your work routine to good use by incorporating your bladder training regimen into your work schedule.
- Try to avoid caffeinated drinks during your work breaks; they can irritate your bladder. Try herbal tea instead.
- If necessary, talk with your boss about locating your workstation closer to the bathroom.

OAB support aids
There are many products and devices available to help you manage your bladder problems such as:

- Incontinence pads
- Waterproof mattress protectors
- Disposable pull-up pants
- Incontinence bed pads
- Washable briefs

Visit **www.needtopee.ie** for further support and information

Treatments

The treatment of Overactive Bladder (OAB) is often quite straightforward. Most OAB treatment plans include simple lifestyle changes and bladder training techniques, as well as pelvic floor exercises to help strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that support your bladder. These steps should help you effectively take control of your bladder problem.

However, if you are having difficulty controlling your condition, your doctor may suggest a treatment plan for you that may include taking a prescription medicine.

There are two classes of treatment available, one class works on the storage phase of the micturition (urine) cycle, while the other class works on the voiding (emptying) phase.

Both of these treatment classes are generally very effective at relieving symptoms, but like all medicines they may cause side effects. If you are experiencing any side effects it's important that you tell your doctor immediately. They may be able to adjust the dose of your medicine or – if necessary – explore other treatment options.

Be patient
Finding an effective remedy for your overactive bladder or urge incontinence may take time, with several steps along the way. If you have any concerns speak to your doctor, nurse or continence advisor.

Q&As

Are bladder problems just a normal part of aging?

No, overactive bladder symptoms can happen at any age, although they are more common as people get older. If you often feel an urgent and overwhelming need to urinate, are making too many trips to the bathroom, and sometimes have leakages, you may have a bladder problem and should contact your GP for advice and treatment.

I'm too embarrassed to talk to my doctor, what should I do?

It's important to remember that overactive bladder is a medical condition where the bladder squeezes uncontrollably. It is not your fault and it's not something you have to live with. OAB is very treatable so take that first step and contact your doctor.

What is bladder training?

This involves learning to delay trips to the toilet when you feel the urge. You start by delaying for short periods of time while gradually building up to longer periods of time between urges, to help regain control over your bladder.

Is overactive bladder treatable?

Yes, OAB symptoms can be managed successfully by bladder training, strengthening your pelvic floor muscles and, if needed, medication.

Who can **help me?**

Your **GP** can investigate possible causes of your OAB symptoms and recommend a treatment plan, which may include prescribing medication. Your GP can also refer you to a hospital specialist for further treatment if required.

A **public health nurse** can assess your OAB and offer advice and may refer you to a continence adviser.

A **continence adviser** is a specialist who can evaluate your OAB and advise you on suitable treatments and how to manage your condition.

A **chartered physiotherapist** can work out an exercise programme to strengthen and improve the muscles that help maintain bladder control.

Your **pharmacist** can offer lifestyle advice on managing OAB, as well as guidance on pharmacological treatment options and how to deal with possible side effects.

Useful Resources
HSE Continence Advisory Service:
Health Service Executive Info Line: 1850 241 850

Continence Foundation of Ireland: www.continence.ie

Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists: 01 402 2148 www.iscp.ie

Visit **www.needtopee.ie** for further support and information

References:
1. Milsom et al. How Widespread are the Symptoms of OAB? BJU Intl. 2001; 87: 760-766.
2. Chapple C. et al. EAU: Information for Patients: Overactive-Bladder Syndrome (OAB). 2019, Feb. p.3.

MAT-IE-NON-2026-00024 Date of Prep: May 2026

astellas

NeedToPee.ie