

June 2010 Newsletter

Stress and Your Bladder

We all take our bodily processes for granted until something goes wrong. But did you know that experiencing stress over long periods of time can have a detrimental effect on the bladder? This might seem far-fetched if you are healthy and well and have never come across such a thing before, but stress manifests itself in many ways and can cause severe physical problems.



Take for example the case of Peter, who sought help from a counsellor because he was feeling hopeless and desperate.

He had been to his GP several times for his bladder problems and had been told that there was nothing wrong with him physically, but that he could think about getting help with his stress.

The counsellor did a careful assessment with Peter and noted that he had had several bladder infections when he was a child, which caused his mum to be over-focused on his frequent toileting and in turn has led him to feel anxious now as an

adult when he needs to pee, particularly when at work.

Now in his thirties Peter finds himself worrying about whether he'll need to leave a work meeting to go to the toilet as soon as the meeting starts. Peter's focus on the very issue he's sensitive about brings up feelings of discomfort as he imagines the embarrassment of leaving the meeting because he 'can't wait' but then if he tries to hold on, he experiences pain in his bladder, starts to sweat, breathe rapidly and feel very anxious. In the end Peter feels overwhelmed by his stress and anxiety and makes a rush for the loo. When he returns to the meeting he feels full of shame.

As we can see in Peter's case, a vicious circle sets itself up whereby he tells himself he'll feel embarrassed by leaving the meeting, which then builds up his stress symptoms (sweating, increased heart-beat and rapid breathing), which dissuades him from going to the loo, which causes pain in his bladder and then brings him back into the fear of embarrassment/stress loop.

A stressed person can also put different pressure on their bladder by not peeing often enough. With a busy day ahead and meetings backed up through the day you might put off going to the loo because you're too busy. You may then only pay attention to the urge to relieve yourself due to intense physical discomfort.

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This is a common habit amongst taxi drivers who often know they need to pee but put off going to the loo because a customer flags them down and in that split second a potential £20 fare seems more important than finding a toilet.

The habit of postponing urination causes the bladder to distend and can result in infections of the bladder or kidneys. Only when the damage is done will you reflect that stress and irrational fears might have been at the heart of the problem.

So, if you recognise that the stress you feel in your life is having a detrimental effect on your bladder, what should you do?

The answer to this question is three-fold:

1. Turn your attention to what you drink by keeping a liquids diary for a few days. What do you notice when you see it all written down? If you drink a lot of coffee this is the first place to start. Caffeine is a mild diuretic which means it takes fluid out of your body and encourages you to pee more frequently – this will leave you thirsty and dehydrated if you drink too much and will further stress your bladder. Caffeine also has negative side effects in that can raise stress levels and cause insomnia.



Health professionals recommend cutting your coffee consumption down to 2-3 cups per day and raising your general liquid intake to 6 – 8 glasses per day. So, why not try alternating a **glass of water** with a cup of coffee in the morning only and then sticking to water, herbal teas and fruit juices over the rest of the day?

2. Book an appointment with a **counsellor** to discuss your stress and anxiety. Talking through your



worries and anxieties with an impartial professional will offer an immediate sense of relief and may help you build new strategies to reduce stress. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is an excellent approach to understanding the link between feelings, thoughts and behaviour and offers a useful way to challenge negative thinking and bring about startling changes to behaviour.



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3. Pay attention to your bladder! If you feel the need to pee, do not put it off but make it your first priority and get yourself off to the loo. Nothing is more important than your physical wellbeing. Taking care of your body while you are young will keep you healthy as you get older.

If you think that your lifestyle has the potential to create long term health problems talking to a counsellor will help. Consulting a nutritional therapist or dietician will also give you the necessary tools to implement change. Visit our website

www.orchardleeds.co.uk or call **0113 281 9493**

We have over 30 Counsellors, Psychotherapists and Psychologists at **The Orchard**, who would be pleased to book you in for counselling, as well as a host of Complementary Therapists.