

ASK the Pharmacist



Q:

I am a middle aged man and at this point bathrooms can't come frequently or fast enough when I'm on the road. I'd rather not take a drug; is there any other way to solve this issue?

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A:

Contrary to popular opinion, men are just as likely as women to develop these sorts of issues, so I thought we'd spend some time this week looking at the issue from the male perspective. Urinary frequency and urgency (described as an intense need to urinate immediately) are major hassles for many males as they can make fulfilling regularly scheduled activities a challenge and can lead to embarrassing leaks that are beyond their control to stop. According to experts up to 50% of men experience these symptoms by the time they turn 60 & a whopping 90% will be dealing with this by age 85. However, it is not at all rare for much younger men to have to deal with this as well. The most common cause for this is an enlarged prostate which surrounds the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body. As the prostate swells with aging, it can squeeze or partly block the urethra leading to the symptoms mentioned above. However, these can also be caused by a condition known as an overactive bladder where the issues lie more with the nerves that control the urination process. When these nerves don't work properly, the muscle in the bladder wall (the detrusor) can become overactive and squeeze the bladder before it has had time to fill adequately. There are other possible causes beyond these two including the presence of an infection within the urinary tract, kidney stones or possibly even a tumor. As such, the first order of business should be to book an appointment with your physician to ensure that there is nothing more insidious going on. Once your doctor rules out other causes, there are steps you can take on your own to help control these symptoms regardless of whether the causative factor is your prostate or damaged nerves. The first step is to look at your medications as many drugs, including some over the counter pills (such as cold and sinus remedies) and herbs can contribute to these sensations. Diet of course can also play a role. Most people know to control their volume of fluid before a long trip or sleep but the choice of fluid can also play a role. Alcohol, caffeinated beverages, carbonated beverages (with or without caffeine), beverages using artificial sweeteners and milk can all worsen the condition relative to alternative choices. As well products containing corn syrup, honey, sugar, spicy foods, tomatoes/tomato-based products and vinegar have also been known to play a role. When it comes down to treating these symptoms, a great drug-free way to do it is to become versed in how to perform Kegel exercises. These exercises serve to strengthen the pelvic floor and can help you improve or even completely regain bladder control. They're very easy to do once you know which muscles to target and when done for five minutes two to three times a day substantial improvements should be noted in as little as 3-6 weeks. As a bonus, these exercises are also known to improve erections and can lead to more intense orgasms. The key to knowing which muscles to target is to try and stop or slow your urine stream when you are halfway done. These are the exact same muscles you will need to contract when you perform these exercises. It is critically important that these are the only muscles that you contract so that buttocks, legs or abdomen are never "tensed" when you perform them. As well, you should continue to breathe normally rather than sub-consciously holding it. Some men find these muscles by pretending they are trying to stop the passage of gas. The muscle should be contracted for a slow count of 5, released for a slow count of 5 and then repeated for a set of 10 which is done three times a day. When you are first starting, it might be easier to perform these lying down so that you are not combating gravity as well. As time goes on, try to stretch the contractions to 10 seconds for further strengthening. If you haven't seen any improvement within a month, there is a decent chance you may not have located the right muscles and perhaps a trip to your physician may be worthwhile for further instruction. Once you get the hang of it, these are easy exercises to perform and can be done discreetly while at the office or on the couch. They are risk free and should lead to a better quality of life in only a few short weeks. For more information about this or any other health related topics, contact the pharmacists at Gordon Pharmasave, Your Health and Wellness Destination.