



Bladder & Bowel Community

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Fact Sheet : Nocturia

Nocturia means waking up at night to pass urine. It is a symptom and not a condition and is very common, particularly in older people. It is quite normal to wake up once or twice a night to empty your bladder, depending on your age and how long you sleep. If you need to do so more often, it can become very annoying and may mean you have an underlying medical problem. However, these problems can often be treated.

Age-related changes

Nocturia is more common in the elderly for several reasons:

- Normally at night the body produces a hormone called the anti-diuretic hormone. This chemical enables the body to retain fluid overnight, which in turn means less urine is made. As you get older you may produce less of this hormone and therefore produce more urine at night.
- Another problem that can occur with ageing is that the heart and circulatory system become less efficient. This means that during the day fluid collects in the tissues of the body, especially around the ankles. Once you are lying down, *the circulatory system works more easily* and this fluid is absorbed into the blood stream and pumped back to the kidneys where it is passed out as extra urine.
- As you get older the bladder is not able to hold so much urine.
- In older men the prostate gland is very likely to start growing and, as it is wrapped round the outlet from the bladder, can as a result restrict it, increasing the need to pass water more frequently.
- Finally older people are more likely to have medical conditions that may have an effect on the bladder.

Other causes of nocturia

There are several conditions that can cause nocturia other than those related to ageing:

1. Problems within the urinary tract, e.g. kidney stones, an overactive bladder or infection.
2. Heart conditions
3. Diabetes
4. Drugs – nocturia can be a side effect of some drugs.
5. Excessive fluid intake
6. Sleep disorders
7. Pregnancy
8. Neurological diseases

Self help strategies

- Do aim for a healthy fluid intake of 6-8 cups of fluid a day (3-4 pints or between 1.5 to 2 litres).
- Do cut down on drinks that contain caffeine (tea, coffee, cola and chocolate) and alcohol, as these can all irritate the bladder and change sleep patterns.
- Do not restrict your overall fluid consumption: there is no evidence that this helps

unless you are drinking excessive amounts.

- If you suffer from swollen ankles it may help to lie down in the afternoon with your feet up for at least an hour. Your feet and legs should preferably be at or above the level of your heart.
- If you are taking medicines, check with your doctor whether they could be causing the problem - for example, some drugs have a side-effect of producing more urine or promoting its flow.

What else can I do about it?

If the problem persists, it is important to make an appointment with your GP or continence advisor who can assess your symptoms to determine the likely cause. They will then be able to suggest possible treatments. Remember Nocturia is a symptom and not a condition therefore you may have another health problem that is causing the nocturia and this can also be treated.

It may be helpful to keep a bladder diary for a week or so before your appointment to help identify your bladder habits or patterns. Use the diary to record how often you go to the loo and what you drink each day. This information can help your health professional identify what your problem is and start the process of diagnosis.

As well as the self-help strategies listed above and the treatment of underlying medical conditions, there are several medications which are used in the treatment of nocturia. Your GP or continence advisor will be able to advise you which treatment options may help you.

The medications include:

- A group of drugs called anticholinergics (e.g. tolterodine or oxybutynin) that can help by relaxing the bladder so that it can hold more urine. Sometimes, however, they have side-effects such as making your mouth dry or causing constipation.
- A drug called desmopressin that works like the body's own hormone to help it retain fluid. It is used as a nasal spray or tablet and reduces the amount of urine you produce overnight.
- Diuretics (or water tablets) that make the body produce more urine. These are sometimes given at teatime to help pass any excess urine before bedtime.

Before you are given either the second or third type of tablets you may be given some routine blood tests to check that they will not cause any adverse effects on the body.

The Bladder and Bowel Community provides information and support for people with bladder and bowel issues. We publish a wide range of user friendly booklets and factsheets.

For more information please call us on 01926 357220, email help@bladderandbowelfoundation.org or write to us at The Bladder and Bowel Community, 7 The Court, Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road, Southam, CV47 0FS.

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