

Problem with a capital Pee

People who 'live from toilet to toilet' may be suffering from overactive bladder, says urologist

SERENE LUO

THINK a colleague is malingering for heading to the toilet too often?

It may just be a case of quietly suffering from an overactive bladder or OAB - where a patient feels the need to answer the call of nature more than the normal eight times a day and even in the night.

Urologist Chin Chong Min, who is also the vice-president of the Singapore Urological Association (SUA), pointed out this little-known medical condition to *my paper*, after making a presentation at an industry talk to doctors two weeks ago.

They "live from toilet to toilet", and may even ask for a change of seats in the office, to be nearer the loo, he said.

Doctors interviewed confirmed that work-related reasons is the main factor pushing most of the 10 per cent to 16 per cent of the population with OAB to seek treatment.

They finally see a doctor when their supervisors think they are malingering, "clock watching", or when they miss out on promotions because their conditions prevent them from doing a better job.

While normal people feel the urge to go when they have 250ml or more urine in their bladders, patients with OAB feel like their bladders are "bursting" even with just 50ml of urine, said Dr Poh Beow Kiong, 34, a registrar urologist with Changi General Hospital.

Even a "medically mild case of OAB would be a major problem for those with certain kinds of job scopes", said consultant urologist Ng Lay Guat, 39, from Singapore General Hospital.

Both men and women can get OAB, though women are more likely than men to wet themselves, say when sneezing or laughing.

Affected workers include drivers who cannot travel long distances, lecturers or trainers who give presentations in cold

air-conditioned environments, or even people who need to make long plane trips.

One self-employed businesswoman, who wanted to be known only as Grace, 28, said she would feel very embarrassed - because she would dash off to the loo in the middle of meetings with prospective clients - in her last job in sales.

She would go as many as 16 times a day, and would even feel like visiting the toilet again five minutes after having gone.

"The whole office would stare, up to the point that colleagues asked how come I visited the toilet so often," she said.

She recovered after two months of medication.

OAB may strike adults as young as 18 years old, said Assistant Professor Siow Woei Yun, an associate consultant from the urology department of National University Hospital.

"There are quite a significant number of adults who are affected, and incidence increases with age," she said.

The hospital set up a Pelvic Floor Centre last year to look at OAB and other related diseases, which will increasingly affect an ageing population.

OAB has no known proven causes, and could be linked to work stress, pregnancy or a change in environments. Doctors diagnose the condition after ruling out more sinister possibilities, such as stones, tumours or infections.

The condition is treated by methods such as reducing the amount of fluids drunk, pelvic floor exercises, medication, or in serious cases, Botox injections to relax the bladder, or even surgery.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

Bladder: 膀胱 páng guāng

Embarrassed: 尴尬 gān gà

UNDERSTANDING THE OVERACTIVE BLADDER

WARNING SIGNS

An easy guide from Dr Chin Chong Min, a urologist in private practice.

F FOR FREQUENCY: A person goes to the toilet to pass urine more than eight times a day, or every two hours or less, especially if he is not drinking much.

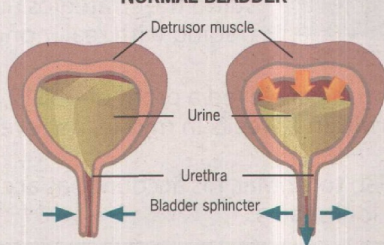
U FOR URGENCY: A person has a strong desire to pass urine, and finds it difficult to hold his bladder.

N FOR NOCTURIA: A person needs to go to the toilet more than once during the night.

WHAT HAPPENS

As explained by Dr Poh Beow Kiong, from Changi General Hospital.

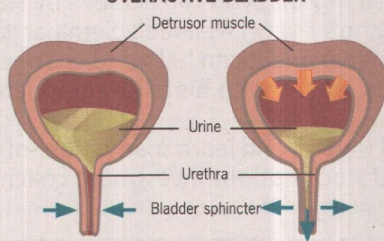
NORMAL BLADDER



1. When urine reaches about 200ml in bladder, brain sends signals to bladder that it is all right to pass urine in a socially acceptable setting.

2. Receptors on bladder receive brain's "instructions", and bladder contracts, pushing urine out.

OVERACTIVE BLADDER



1. When urine is as little as 50ml in bladder - much less than the normal 200ml-trigger point - it begins to contract, and person has urge to pass urine.

2. Three theories to why this happens exist: the brain is unable to control the bladder; the bladder is over-sensitive; or the nervous system between the brain and bladder is not functioning properly.