

Urge Suppression

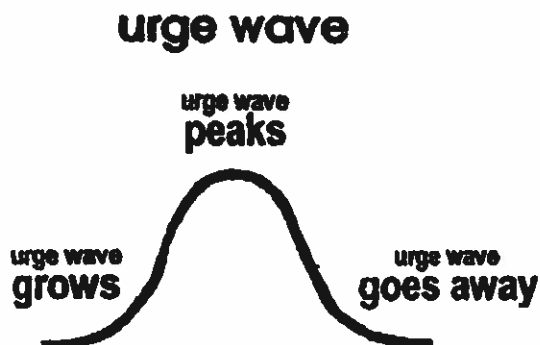
Urge Incontinence

Urge incontinence is the loss of urine when you have a strong urge or desire to void or empty your bladder and are unable to make it to the bathroom in time.

Urge or urgency is a feeling – nothing more

It is an uncomfortable feeling that makes you want to empty your bladder. It may indicate that your bladder is full and ready to empty. Your bladder may not be full and may be contracting and trying to empty anyway. The urge is a message from your bladder telling you to void. Do you have to obey?

You have probably heard the phrase, 'when you gotta go, you gotta go'. This implies that there is no choice. Not true. Immediate voiding is not necessary. The urge feeling lets you know only that voiding is necessary, not that voiding must occur immediately. Your goal is not to void until you reach a toilet, something that may not be available right away. The normal bladder has learned to wait; your bladder has lost that ability. Improved control will be yours when you restrain your bladder to wait.



Normal urge feelings come in waves. First, you feel the urge a little. It grows, it peaks, and finally it goes away. With urge incontinence people have temporarily lost the ability to make urges go away, or do not take the time to make urges go away. They are too busy rushing to the toilet when urgency is at its peak.

Don't rush to the bathroom

As the urgency feeling increases and voiding seems necessary most people with urge incontinence rush to the toilet, believing that the faster they get there, the better. You may feel that its only a matter of time before your bladder starts to empty but that you will be okay as long as you can 'beat it' to the toilet.

It may seem that rushing to the bathroom is the best thing, and the only thing, you can do. Actually rushing is the worst thing. Rushing itself contributes to accidents for four reasons:

- Rushing jiggles your bladder, increasing your awareness of how full it feels and making the urgency worse
- Movement can stimulate the bladder to contract and empty
- Rushing puts extra abdominal pressure on the bladder and tends to push urine out
- Rushing interferes with the concentration that you need to control your bladder

Getting to the bathroom just in time seems to be evidence that faster is better. It may seem like the best thing because you barely make it there before you start to drip or you start dripping just before you reach the toilet.

But it is no coincidence that you make it to the bathroom as urgency reaches its peak. For a person with urge incontinence, it is the bathrooms itself that makes the urge worse and contributes to the accident.

Approaching the toilet can be the most difficult time for anyone to control the bladder. Have you ever noticed that seeing a bathroom or even thinking about a bathroom makes you feel like you have to use it? After many years of urinating in bathrooms, the bathroom has become associated with urination. You have been conditioned, so that the bathroom actually triggers your desire to urinate. Therefore, if you have an urge to void, approaching the bathroom is likely to heighten the need to void and makes incontinence more likely.

For a person with urge incontinence, the worst time to head for the bathroom is when you have a strong urge to urinate. The best time is before you get the urge or after you have successfully reduced or made the urge disappear.

You may think that the only way to relieve the uncomfortable feeling or urgency is to empty your bladder, but this is not so. Urges can come and go without emptying your bladder; they are simply messages telling you that eventually you will need to void. Urges are not commands. They should function as an early warning, getting you ready to find a place to void - after you have relaxed and suppressed the urge.

Reduce the urge

To reduce or eliminate the urge to void, you will use your pelvic floor muscles. When you start to feel the urge, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles quickly several times. Do not relax fully in between squeezes. Try this now.

Squeezing your pelvic floor muscles in this way sends a message to your bladder to stop contracting. As your bladder stops contracting and starts relaxing, the urge feeling subsides.

Then once the urge to void has subsided you have a safe period when the bladder is calm. This 'calm period' is the best time to go to the bathroom.



6 simple steps to follow when an urge feeling strikes:

- 1 Stop what you are doing and stay put. Sit down when possible, or stand quietly. Remain very still. When you are still it is easier to control the urge.
- 2 Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles quickly several times. Do not relax fully in between.
- 3 Relax the rest of your body. Take a few deep breaths to relax and let go of your tension.
- 4 Distract yourself by thinking about something else, eg. saying the alphabet backwards.
- 5 Wait until the urge subsides.
- 6 Walk to the bathroom at a normal pace. Do not rush. Continue squeezing your pelvic muscles quickly while you walk.

Be prepared

Urgency often strikes when you least expect it. You can prepare for urgency by learning to anticipate when it will strike. Review your bladder diary for situations where you had urge accidents. As you approach one of these situations, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles quickly several times. This may prevent your urge feeling from starting.

With continued practice, you will be able to suppress urgency, so that the urge feeling will diminish or go away. You may even be able to avoid the urge entirely.

Information from:

Burgio, K.L., Pearce, K.L. & Luno, A.J. (1989).
Staying Dry: A Practical Guide to Bladder Control.
The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore.