

## OVERACTIVE BLADDER

### ***What is an overactive bladder?***

The condition known as “overactive bladder” (OAB) is the most common cause of urinary incontinence or loss of bladder control in adults and affects approximately 33 million Americans. A person with OAB has a frequent and compelling urge to urinate. This is often associated with a loss of bladder control. The urge can be sudden and intense, and is often followed by an involuntary, uncontrollable loss of urine, a condition called “urge urinary incontinence.” OAB is common in both men and women, although women are more likely to have OAB with urge urinary incontinence than men. Although OAB is a condition that is more common among the elderly, it affects people of all ages and may start early. For the vast majority of patients, the underlying cause of the overactive bladder is not known. For a smaller group of patients, the overactive bladder is caused by an underlying neurogenic disease.

For many patients, OAB can cause medical and psychosocial problems. In certain patients, OAB can necessitate the use of pads and diapers, cause skin rashes and infections and disrupt sleep. Affected patients often change their lifestyle, avoiding absences from home and only visiting places where they know the exact location of the bathroom. Urinary incontinence also is a leading reason elderly patients are admitted to nursing homes.

### ***What causes overactive bladder symptoms?***

The bladder is a muscular organ that stores and eliminates urine. The brain and nervous system control the bladder muscle enabling urine to collect and the bladder to empty during urination. An overactive bladder frequently contracts too often or too quickly leading to the symptoms that characterize OAB, including frequency, urgency and incontinence.

Diagnosis of OAB involves a thorough review of the patient’s medical history and a physical examination. Additional examinations usually include urine tests, ultrasound and some times a special pressure/flow study of the bladder function (urodynamics).

### ***How are overactive bladder symptoms treated?***

In most cases, OAB symptoms can be treated with the appropriate therapy. Unfortunately, many of those who suffer from the condition are too embarrassed to seek help, or consider it an unavoidable aspect of aging and fail to discuss the symptoms with their physician. Studies show that fewer than one in five patients with bladder control problems receive medical assistance or treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Primary care physicians can diagnose and treat typical OAB, but a large proportion of patients are referred to urologists or urogynecologists (specialists in gynecology and urology problems in women) for specialized care.

A combination of behavior modification (e.g., pelvic floor exercises, bladder retraining, lifestyle modifications) to improve bladder control and medication (e.g., oral anticholinergics) to reduce hyperactivity of the bladder muscle is usually prescribed as first line therapy for OAB to reduce the symptoms and to re-establish bladder control.

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**For more information, please contact Caroline Van Hove (714) 246-5134, Allergan, Inc.**

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<sup>1</sup>The Public Health Implications of Urogenital Disease: A Focus on Overactive Bladder. *Clinician*. 2003;21(4). ISSN: 0264-6404. Presented by: Office of Women’s Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.