



THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANT LEARN & ADVISE



MODULE 18: OCTOBER 2016

Bladder weakness

Bladder weakness is a common condition and most pharmacies stock a range of products that can help customers to manage the condition. You can support customers by responding to queries with sensitivity and confident recommendations.

To understand how bladder weakness occurs, it helps to consider how the urinary system functions. This system consists of a number of interconnected structures whose job it is to make, store and excrete urine, one of the body's waste products.

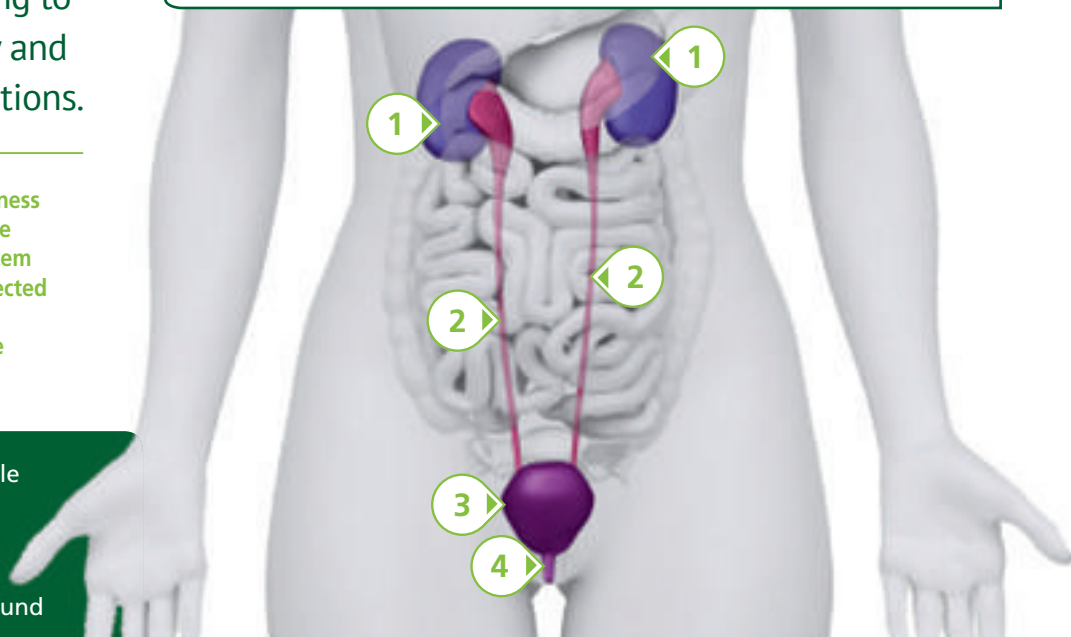
- **Sphincter** – a circle of muscle around the opening of the bladder. Keeps urine inside and prevents leaks.
- **Pelvic floor muscles** – surround and support the bladder and urethra. A strong pelvic floor helps prevent leaks.
- **Prostate gland** – a small gland located between the penis and the bladder in men. It is involved in semen production, but if it becomes enlarged, it presses on the bladder and urethra, affecting urination.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this module, assistants will:

- Have a basic understanding of the structure of the urinary system
- Be familiar with common types of bladder weakness
- Know what treatment options are available and the lifestyle advice that may help.



- 1 Kidneys:** two bean-shaped organs, each about the size of a fist, located near the middle of the back, just below the rib cage. The kidneys filter blood to remove waste products and excess fluid from the body via the production of urine.
- 2 Ureters:** each kidney is connected to the bladder via a thin tube called a ureter. Muscles in the walls of the ureters constantly contract and relax to take urine from the kidneys to the bladder.

- 3 Bladder:** this muscular bag stores urine, expanding and stretching as it fills up. When it reaches about half full, nerve signals alert the brain to the fact that the person needs the toilet. Although it varies, the average person empties their bladder four to eight times a day and occasionally during the night.
- 4 Urethra:** this tube takes urine from the bladder to outside the body. It's relatively short in women, and longer in men.



This module is suitable for all members of the pharmacy team who wish to increase their knowledge of common conditions, treatment options and communication skills. This module has been endorsed with the NPA's Training Seal as suitable for use by pharmacy teams as part of their ongoing learning. This module can also form part of your Team Tuesday training.

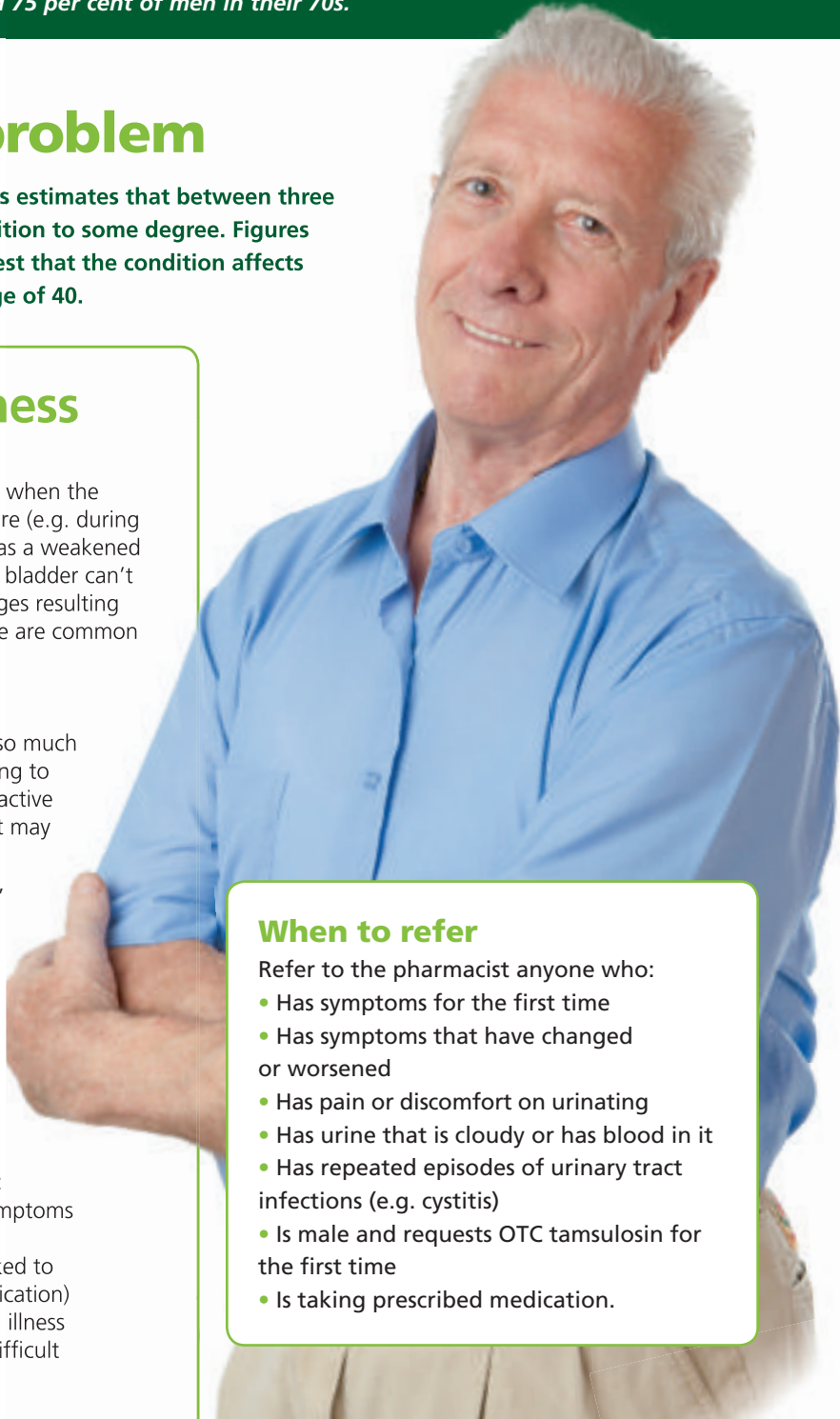


DID YOU KNOW?

An enlarged prostate gland affects around 40 per cent of men over the age of 50 and 75 per cent of men in their 70s.

Understanding the problem

Bladder weakness is relatively common – NHS Choices estimates that between three and six million people in the UK experience the condition to some degree. Figures from bladder weakness protection brand TENA suggest that the condition affects one in three women and one in four men over the age of 40.



Types of bladder weakness

1 Stress incontinence
The most common type in women, this occurs when the bladder is put under sudden, additional pressure (e.g. during exercise, coughing or laughing). If a woman has a weakened pelvic floor, this extra pressure means that her bladder can't hold urine and small amounts may leak. Changes resulting from pregnancy, childbirth and the menopause are common causes of stress incontinence.

2 Urge incontinence
This is a sudden, intense need to pass urine – so much so that the person may be unable to delay going to the toilet. It is often caused by a sensitive/overactive bladder and while the exact cause is unclear, it may be linked to things like uncontrolled diabetes, diuretics, anxiety, excessive alcohol or caffeine, or urinary tract infections.

3 Overflow incontinence
Less common, but more likely in men, this occurs when the bladder is obstructed in some way (e.g. by an enlarged prostate gland or urinary stones) and cannot be emptied completely. Small trickles of urine may leak at intervals.

Other, less common types of bladder weakness include:

- **Mixed incontinence** – occurs when a person has symptoms of both stress and urge incontinence
- **Transient incontinence** – a temporary condition linked to a cause that will pass (e.g. infection, taking a new medication)
- **Functional incontinence** – symptoms result from an illness (e.g. Alzheimer's) or a physical disability that makes it difficult to reach the toilet in time.

When to refer

Refer to the pharmacist anyone who:

- Has symptoms for the first time
- Has symptoms that have changed or worsened
- Has pain or discomfort on urinating
- Has urine that is cloudy or has blood in it
- Has repeated episodes of urinary tract infections (e.g. cystitis)
- Is male and requests OTC tamsulosin for the first time
- Is taking prescribed medication.

Common causes

While the exact cause varies depending on the type of bladder weakness, there are factors that increase a person's chance of experiencing the condition.

These factors include:

- Pregnancy and vaginal birth
- Menopause
- Obesity
- Family history
- Strenuous exercise, heavy lifting
- Age
- Medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, stroke, dementia,

frequent bladder infections, constipation). In men, an enlarged prostate gland (known as benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH) can cause symptoms. As the prostate gets larger, it puts pressure on the bladder and the urethra, making it difficult to start urination or to empty the bladder fully. It can also lead to a sudden urge to urinate or the need to urinate frequently at night. BPH affects around 40 per cent of men over the age of 50 and 75 per cent of men in their 70s

- Neurological damage (e.g. Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida, brain injury)
- Certain medications (e.g. diuretics, ACE inhibitors, some antidepressants, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), sedatives).



DID YOU KNOW?

Dehydration makes urine more concentrated and this can irritate the bladder.



Don't forget...

Sanitary towels are not recommended for bladder weakness. Instead, direct customers towards brands that offer products specifically designed to absorb urine and control the associated odour.

Management advice

People who experience bladder weakness should not suffer in silence, particularly if symptoms affect their self-esteem or impact on daily activities. It is important to seek medical advice for a correct diagnosis and help with treating and managing the condition. Management products are available from the pharmacy, and you can offer the following advice:

1

Symptom diary

A useful first step is to keep a diary of symptoms. Customers should record what they drink, when they go to the toilet, and any episodes of urine leakage.

2

Pelvic floor exercises

Strengthening the pelvic floor muscles helps support the bladder and provides control during urination. These muscles can be felt when we stop the flow of urine when going to the toilet – although it's not a good idea to do this regularly.

To exercise these muscles, customers should practise squeezing them 10-15 times in a row. This should be done without holding the breath or using other muscles in the stomach, buttocks, etc. The number of squeezes and the length of time they are held for should be gradually increased. When performed regularly over three to six months, these exercises should have a beneficial effect on stress incontinence.

3

Bladder weakness management products

Specially designed protection pads and pants, in a range of sizes and absorbencies, are available for both men and women. Available brands include TENA, Always Discreet and Depend.

4

OTC tamsulosin

Men aged 45-75 who go to the toilet frequently because of an enlarged prostate may be able to self-medicate with OTC tamsulosin (e.g. Flomax Relief MR). Customers who request this product for the first time should be referred to the pharmacist. If appropriate, they will be able to buy a two-week trial pack and, after this, a further four-week supply. Men taking OTC tamsulosin should see a doctor within the first six weeks for a full prostate check, after which they may continue to self-medicate, provided they see a doctor annually and/or if their symptoms change or worsen.

5

Alternative therapies

Some pharmacies may stock products that contain pumpkin seed extract. These are traditional herbal medicinal products that are used to relieve lower urinary tract symptoms related to an overactive bladder or bladder weakness, exclusively based upon long-standing use as traditional remedies.



Added advice

- **Drink plenty of fluid (six to eight glasses a day)** – some people limit their fluid intake, thinking it will help their symptoms. However, this only makes urine more concentrated and can irritate the bladder
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol** – caffeine can irritate the bladder, while alcohol is a diuretic and increases urination
- **Eat a healthy diet** – adequate fibre intake helps reduce the risk of constipation, while losing extra weight will benefit symptoms too. It's also a good idea to avoid spicy and acidic foods, which may irritate the bladder
- **Exercise appropriately** – some high impact, strenuous forms of exercise, such as jogging and weight training, may increase the risk of urine leakage. Instead, customers should focus on stretching and strengthening core muscles (e.g. Pilates, yoga)
- **Quit smoking** – this helps avoid excessive coughing, which can put strain on the pelvic floor muscles.



SIGNPOSTING

For more information, you can:

- Use your *Counter Intelligence Plus* training guide
- Take a look at NHS Choices: [nhs.uk/conditions/Incontinence-urinary](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Incontinence-urinary)
- Visit The Continence Foundation: [continence-foundation.org.uk](https://www.continence-foundation.org.uk)
- Look up TENA: [tena.co.uk](https://www.tena.co.uk) for pharmacy support.

Teamwork: part 2

For a team to function effectively it must have individuals who each contribute differently and who complement each other. For this to occur, certain skills are needed

Part 1 described the nine roles necessary for a successful team and explained how they can generally be divided into 'task' or 'process' roles. To recap, task roles focus on what the job is and getting it done. Process roles focus on how the job is done and particularly on the people involved.

The most effective teamworkers are those who can see what skills are available within the group, and use their own skills to fill any gaps. There are specific skills that are needed to take on task- and process-focused roles. These include:

Key task-focused team skills

Organising and planning

If you don't know what needs to be done, and by when, it's quite hard to make it happen by your deadline. 'Shapers', 'implementers' and 'completer-finishers' are all characterised by good organising skills, and can usually be relied upon to put in place strong systems for managing projects well.

Decision-making

Group decision-making often requires compromise, and sometimes a willingness to give up one's own point of view in favour of the group's shared decision. 'Shapers' and 'monitor-evaluators' are both good decision-makers. 'Shapers', however, tend to make their own decisions quickly and then may struggle to compromise. 'Monitor-evaluators' tend to look for the right decision from the available evidence, and may be slow to make a decision if there is a shortage of evidence.

Problem-solving

'Plants' look for innovative ideas to solve the problem, and 'implementers' will turn ideas into practical action. 'Shapers' will see the big picture and the overall plan, making sure that the solution to the problem does not result in a change of direction.



Remember

It is important to remember that all teamworking situations are fundamentally about working with other people. If you have good interpersonal skills, and are open to receiving feedback and improving them as a result, then you will become, and be, a good person to work with in a team. It really is as simple as that.

Key process-focused team skills

Process-focused skills tend to be about people, and about building rapport within the group and making it work cohesively and effectively. Those who take on process-focused group roles tend to have very good interpersonal skills, and in particular:

Communication

These people work hard to ensure that the group communicates well, helping to make sure that there are no misunderstandings or unexpressed difficulties between team members through effective verbal communication, listening, and questioning.

Ability to build rapport

These people are also good at developing a sense of harmony and rapport within the group, creating a coherent team.

Persuasion and influencing

One of the key areas of process skills is in persuading and influencing. If the group is to come to a shared decision, for example, several members may need to be persuaded of the merits of a particular course of action.

Facilitation

Managing a process is basically about facilitating it, or making it easier.

Feedback

Being able to give clear and effective feedback to others is vital to keep the group process running effectively and to plan. It also helps to ensure that you do not get irritated and angry with the way that others are behaving. It follows that you also need to be able to receive feedback gracefully, and then act on it calmly.

Chairing meetings

Group work often involves meetings and skilled coordinators often have highly developed skills in chairing meetings, and use them in small and large groups alike.

Conflict resolution

You have to recognise that there may be situations when you need to deal with difficult people or situations, or even resolve a conflict.

TEST YOURSELF ONLINE

GOOD PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT WHEN ADVISING CUSTOMERS



Questions

- 1) Which statement is **FALSE**?
- The average person empties their bladder more than eight times a day
 - The kidneys filter blood to remove waste products and excess fluid
 - The prostate gland can affect urination if it becomes enlarged
 - The urethra is shorter in women than in men
- 2) Which of the following definitions describes stress incontinence?
- A sudden, intense need to pass urine
 - Leaking urine when the bladder is put under additional pressure, e.g. when exercising
 - A transient condition linked to an infection
 - It occurs when the bladder is obstructed and can't be emptied properly
- 3) Which of the following is **TRUE**?
- Family history has no bearing on someone's chances of experiencing bladder weakness
 - BPH is an abbreviation of bladder pregnancy hormone
 - Taking medicines such as antidepressants can cause bladder weakness
 - Overflow incontinence mainly affects women
- 4) What advice is appropriate for a customer in her 40s who has stress incontinence?
- She can use sanitary pads to absorb the leaking urine
 - She could try OTC tamsulosin
 - Regular pelvic floor exercises may help
 - She should reduce her fluid intake
- 5) A customer is enquiring about OTC tamsulosin, which he hasn't used before. What do you need to do?
- Refer him to his GP
 - Refer him to the pharmacist
 - Advise him he can purchase a two-week supply then he must see the pharmacist
 - Remind him to see his GP annually
- 6) Which of the following customers would you **NOT** need to refer to the pharmacist?
- A woman in her 60s who wants advice on the different types of absorbent pads
 - A man in his 50s taking OTC tamsulosin who sees his GP annually, but complains of a bit of a stinging sensation when he urinates
 - A woman in her 40s with symptoms of urge incontinence and blood in her urine
 - A woman in her 50s who needs to go to the toilet 10 times a day and is always thirsty



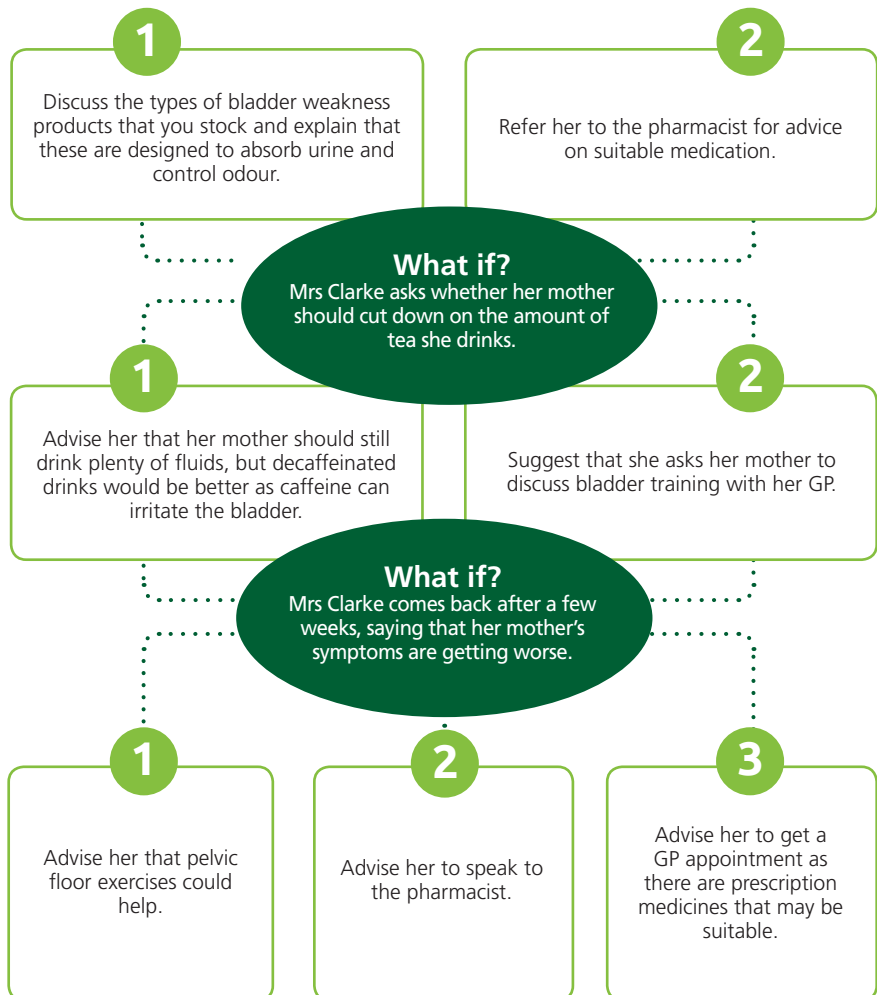
Scenario

Mrs Clarke wants some advice. She looks after her mother, and has noticed that she sometimes has 'little accidents'. She wants to purchase some kind of pad, like a sanitary towel, for her mum to use when she's not around to help her get to the toilet on time.



What would you recommend?

For each part of this scenario, think about the decision you would make and, importantly, why you would choose that option. Think about how you would talk to the customer and provide the necessary advice. You can discuss this with your team and pharmacist.



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