

CHRISTINE

Oh good afternoon. Does caffeine act as a diuretic in everyone or just those who are sensitive to it?

MYERS

Do you find that taking coffee makes you want to pass water?

CHRISTINE

Not me no but I've got a relative who's been told to go on to a caffeine free diet and they suffer from detrusor muscle instability. Have done this and found it makes no difference at all.

MYERS

Alright, well it's a clear question - Mark what would you say - caffeine makes you want to pee?

SLACK

Good afternoon Christine.

CHRISTINE

Good afternoon.

LACK

A very good question, a very important one. Caffeine is slightly diuretic, it makes you pass more water and it also slightly irritates the bladder in susceptible bladders. So common advice for people who've got overactive bladder - that's when they're going a lot and having to rush to the loo - is to try a diet avoiding caffeine. So that's caffeine in tea, coffee and carbonated cold drinks. It won't make an appreciable difference to everybody, so the advice should be try a diet without caffeine, if it improves things you have an answer, if it makes no difference at all well then I wouldn't condemn you to a life without your favourite drink.

MYERS

Hope that's helpful. Thank you very much.

CHRISTINE

Yes thank you very much.

MYERS

If you don't drink so much coffee or caffeinated drinks a lot of people struggle because we're told to drink quite a lot and yet a lot of people don't want to drink water, so how much should we drink and in what form should we take it?

SLACK

In direct fluid that you're drinking, because remember you get a lot of fluid in your food as well, and direct fluid that you're drinking you should drink about one and a half litres a day. And that would be water - and I don't advocate that everybody rushes out and buys bottles of water - but water people can drink, cool drinks - things like cranberry juice are very good for the bladder, other juices. And then decaffeinated teas and decaffeinated coffees have come a long way and are quite tasty.

YERS

Okay, thanks for that. We'll go to Edith Davies, who's in Kent and is waking up every two or three hours during the night and needs the loo. I guess you're a bit tired Edith?

DAVIES

Well yes I am and this is really why I'm ringing because I'm constantly tired all day and I seem to wake up out of a deep sleep and then - it's not that I'm not going back to sleep again, it's just that in another couple of hours I'm up again. Now this used - I think I've told you that in the past it was always a case if we were going out anywhere I had to know that somewhere there'd be a loo because I seemed as though everything I drank was going straight through me but now I can for

hours during the day. And I've asked my doctor about this and said well what happens to what I'm drinking, he said it goes round the system. Well my system ...

MYERS

Edith you've given us a lot of information there and I think probably enough to help Mark Slack give you some advice. So Mark what are you going to say to Edith?

SLACK

Edith the problem you describe is a very distressing problem and is one that actually lots of people suffer from, so there are lots of ladies, especially over the age of 65, 70 that suffer with this problem, we call it nocturnal enuresis or nocturia, which means that you've got to get up a lot. Now the first thing we need to really know is when you get up do you pass large amounts of water or do you get up frequently and pass small amounts of water?

DAVIES

It's usually quite a lot, the first one is about two o'clock in the morning and is usually quite a lot and it's never just a trickle, the third time is still a fair amount.

SLACK

Well Edith one of the very important things you can do here is to get advice from your general practitioner or from the continence advisor in your area or from one of the urogynaecologists and what we'd get you to do would be to keep a diary for a few days where you actually measure how much urine you pass every time you get up at night. And then that would help us work out whether the cause is with the bladder or possibly with something else. As people age their kidneys change their function slightly and they can make a bit too much urine at night and that may not necessarily be your bladder. But with that diary we'd be able to work that out and then there are quite a lot of things we can do, we'd advise you to drink less fluid in the evening before you go to bed and then there are some medications that we could prescribe for you which could improve it, not necessarily cure it, I don't know that we can cure the problem but we could go a long way to improving the way you are and getting you a better night's sleep.

MYERS

Hope that's helpful Edith, I mean in general terms if people are concerned about how much they pass and getting up in the night to do it and indeed in the day, are you suggesting Mark that it would be a good idea to keep a diary and then go with that to their doctor in the first instance?

SLACK

Very, very useful, most people shouldn't get up more than once at night, once at night is not uncommon. But if you're getting up two or more times that's clearly not right. And a diary where you actually measure the amount that you pass at night, which can be tricky.

MYERS

I was wondering, I mean have you got a simple tip for that?

SLACK

No we don't actually ...

MYERS

Bottles, pans.

SLACK

Yeah generally so, just to buy a very cheap measuring flask from the supermarket. The Americans have some lovely devices for measuring but they're not available in the UK at the moment.

MYERS

They're ahead of us on that one. Okay. We'll go to an e-mail because Mike has heard that to ward off incontinence in older age, he says, it's a good practice to interrupt the flow of urination by muscle contraction. Is this true? Is it true?

SLACK

Well the answer to Mike is no, in a simple question. As a man incontinence is not really related to weakness or strength of the pelvic floor. Weakness of the pelvic floor is a female problem. In men incontinence is generally a prostatic complication or a complication of surgery that the men have

had for prostatic cancer.

MYERS

This is the prostate gland which often does enlarge anyway in older men.

SLACK

It does, it enlarges in older men and it gives them symptoms of bladder problems and when they get operated on they can often get incontinence. However, it does raise a very, very important question, which is should a woman do this? And the simple answer is please don't, it is a very, very unphysiological and unnatural thing to interrupt the flow of urine and it can actually create more problems than it can solve. So ...

MYERS

Well that will come as a surprise I think to a lot of women, including me, because I've certainly seen it said that it's a helpful thing to do from time to time, almost to see that you can still hold the bladder and it's actually a good exercise. But it's not a good exercise you're saying?

SLACK

A significant percentage of women who've had children are unable to actually interrupt their flow of urine, it's a boy trick not a girl trick. And they really shouldn't do it. It's a bad habit and there are many other ways of exercising the pelvic floor, much, much more effectively, so please don't do that.

MYERS

Alright, thank you very much. We'll go on now to a call from Tony Ellison, in London, who again finds herself tripping to the loo quite frequently, how frequently Tony?

ELLISON

Well round about every sort of half hour really.

MYERS

Oh that is frequently.

ELLISON

Yeah it's really often and I really need to go and kind of when I go out anywhere for the day I constantly have to know that there's a loo going to be around somewhere.

MYERS

And you're in the younger age group.

ELLISON

Yeah I'm in my 30s.

MYERS

So that's quite awkward isn't it, if you're having to think about where you're going to find the next loo, given that you want to go within the half hour. So does that limit your lifestyle a bit?

ELLISON

Well not too much, I just noticed that it's more than other people that I'm with really, so if we've been on a journey I'm the first one to say, as soon as we get anywhere, I've got to go straight to the loo really. So it's kind of not too limiting but I think I have to sort of plan around it a little bit really.

MYERS

Let me hand you over to Mark.

SLACK

Tony, you're describing a very, very common problem. Do you have children?

ELLISON

No.

SLACK

No children yet, right, well it's less common in people who've not had children but it's very, very common and we call it overactive bladder, which is just a simple explanation - people go too many times. Now generally speaking in your sort of age group, without children, it's bad habits that create this and people tend to be fussed, so they go to the loo and gradually what they do is they don't stretch their bladder, they lower the capacity of it and then make it a bad habit. And I would give similar advice that I gave to Christine earlier - try the avoiding the caffeine and see if that makes a difference and then remember that your brain controls your bladder, so when you were a little child you initially void by reflex and as you get older, when you find it's inconvenient to wet your pants, your brain teaches you how to hold on. And basically you've got to go back to that and we call it bladder retraining. So what we'd like you to do is when you get the need to go see if you can hold on.

MYERS

Are you saying then Mark that this is psychological - people feeling the urge to go is actually just that, a feeling rather than the bladder telling them please empty me I'm full now?

SLACK

No it's both. I think in Tony's case she's describing a situation where there is a psychological element but then there is also a pathological condition where the bladder doesn't distend to its full capacity and it triggers early. But this can also show significant improvement by retraining it - by stretching it - holding on to the urine inside the bladder and getting it to stretch to a slightly larger capacity.

MYERS

So you can't see Tony, we can't see you of course, and you're not about to diagnose whether she might have this other condition that causes a problem within the bladder. Are you suspecting that in the first instance it's to do with the need to retrain the bladder, to hold on longer and not to feel the urge to go quite so frequently?

SLACK

Yes I think in the first instance it is, she may well have an overactive bladder due to what we call detrusor instability, which is where the muscle of the bladder contracts too prematurely, she may well have that. But that too would also be initially treated by bladder retraining - holding on, trying to increase the gaps between voiding. And it takes a long time Tony for those sensations to go away.

MYERS

Well I'm thinking - how are you reacting to all this, we're talking about ...

ELLISON

I think it's really interesting because the only thing - the only connection I've every thought about - I don't know if it does relate - is I had a really bad bout of cystitis when I was in my teens, like it was really - I was absolutely desperate to go and when they treated it, you know it was really, really bad and I think I felt it was ever since then whether any damage has happened. My only concern really with holding on is whether you can do any damage to the bladder by actually holding on and not letting yourself go?

SLACK

No you won't do - you won't do any damage Tony. The relationship between infection and these symptoms we're not entirely sure about, we do think infections can cause some of these conditions but we don't really have the research to back it up. You won't cause damage, if you're holding on to the bladder it will not let you over distend it, if it's a normally functioning bladder. And you know you can always check that by measuring how much you pass and you'd be wanting to pass somewhere between 350 and 450 mls, that's about the normal amount. And then if that didn't help you could also get additional help from taking medication, which would just help you in your first two to three months - holding on and getting this slightly - getting your bladder to distend itself a bit.