

Dealing with a 'very emotional organ'

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Taking control of your body, life after surgery

The Seniors Health Network each month poses a question to health-care professionals. This month, Sam Hughes – an Ocean Park physiotherapist who helped develop the Bladder Clinic in Surrey – was asked:

"My husband just had prostate surgery and, although the surgery went well, he is struggling with urinary incontinence. He doesn't want to talk about it but he never wants to go anywhere and it's having a big impact on our life. Is this how it will always be?"

One of the main side-effects of radical prostatectomy surgery is urinary incontinence.

Men may experience involuntary loss of urine, due to damage in the sphincters of the urethra (the valves that controls urine loss).

Urinary incontinence can have a great impact on men's emotional and psychological state. Fortunately, the amount of urine loss decreases over time, and there is a high percentage of men who will be completely dry six months to one year after the surgery.

Understanding bladder recovery principles and making sure the pelvic floor muscles – postural muscles that support the bladder and the external urethral sphincter – are strong can speed up recovery. If these muscles

are healthy and coordinated, they can help increase bladder support and control urine loss.

Another important skill to learn during recovery is relaxation. Relaxation helps men's emotional state and pelvic floor muscle function. Muscles can't function well if they are always tensed. They need rest to recover.



Sam Hughes
physiotherapist

There are other factors that may contribute to bladder function and recovery.

Caffeine and alcohol can excite the bladder and speed up urine production. When bladder is excited, a strong sensation to urinate occurs.

Drinking water consistently keeps urine diluted and bladder calmer. To diminish a strong reaction from the bladder (strong bladder contraction), water should be drank slowly. The recommendation is six to eight cups of fluid a day, but it may vary.

Drinking regular amounts of water also help maintain soft stools and avoid constipation. When stools are impacted, it will affect abdominal pressure and downward weight towards the bladder. Having a healthy diet, ingesting good amount of fibres, being active and drinking good amounts of fluids can help manage constipation.

Maintaining emotional

and psychological health is important, especially with bladder issues.

Bladder and sphincter function is controlled by the nervous system, and if there is a disruption in the nervous system – such as emotional distress – it will affect bladder function.

I usually call the bladder a very emotional organ, as stress and anxiety will cause urgency and frequency.

Another important factor that can help men during recovery is a support system. I found after my research project (group exercise classes for men after prostatectomy) that men who were part of the group program improved their incontinence and its impact on their quality

of life. The group program added the support that men needed and made them more compliant with their home program.

It was such a positive experience that it led me to develop group info classes for men pre- and post-prostatectomy.

Visit samhughesphysiotherapy.com

The South Surrey White Rock Seniors Health Network is a coalition of seniors service providers working under the auspices of the Mayor of White Rock's office. For community resources, visit sswr.fetchbc.ca. If you have a question for publication, email seniorshealthnetworksswr@gmail.com

