

## ANXIETY AND FEARS IN WOMEN WITH OVERACTIVE BLADDER

### Hypothesis / aims of study

The purpose of the survey was to learn about perceptions and concerns that arise as women confront the aging process and where bladder health is among their list of worries. The survey also examined women's fears about bladder control and their willingness to take action to resolve a variety of health issues through lifestyle changes and other changes, in the face of mild to moderate symptoms of overactive bladder (OAB).

### Study design, materials and methods

This survey was designed and questions were framed by utilizing constructs drawn from the Health Belief Model, a social learning and psychological model that attempts to explain and predict health behaviours. In order to identify and segregate women according to symptom severity, a published, validated OAB screening tool was used to recruit potential respondents. Women were tapped because they are at least twice as likely to experience OAB and urinary incontinence as men; middle-aged women were targeted because of the impact of menopause with regard to signs of aging and general health vulnerability. The survey compared responses from 1,017 women ages 40 to 65 years with no OAB symptoms to responses from 652 women of the same ages with mild to moderate symptoms of OAB.

### Results

The survey found that nearly a third (30%) of women with mild to moderate OAB symptoms are concerned about the health of their bladder. Half (52%) of women with OAB symptoms worry about the possibility of having an accident in public on average once a day, compared to 7% of women without OAB symptoms. Only slightly more than half (57%) of women with OAB symptoms said they feel in control of their lives most of the time compared to the majority of women (78%) without symptoms. In addition, 25% of women with OAB symptoms usually feel somewhat or extremely unhealthy, compared to 9% of women without OAB symptoms. Most women with OAB would rather make lifestyle changes such as exercising more (78%) and diet changes (69%) than taking prescription drugs (61%). Eight in ten women (79%) who suffer from OAB express fear of not being able to engage in activities (traveling, exercising, etc.). Similarly 69% name activities (traveling, sex life, etc.) that would get better if they had complete bladder control. Less than one in five women (18%) with OAB symptoms feel properly in control of their bladders, compared to 58% of their counterparts without such symptoms. Moreover, more than half of the women with OAB symptoms (53%) said that they think their bladder leakage will get worse over time.

### Interpretation of results

Millions of middle-aged women struggle to feel in control of their health and their bladders as they get older. The significant difference between the two groups illustrates how unsettling it is for women in the prime of their lives to lose even the mildest degree of bladder control, even if they are not routinely experiencing leakage accidents. The survey found that of the women with OAB symptoms, only 13% have ever been diagnosed with the condition, pointing to the fact that many women experience OAB symptoms, but are not diagnosed and therefore less likely to be educated about possible interventions. They thus remain trapped by their fears of inevitable worsening of symptoms as they age.

Overall, the study demonstrated that patients wish to be empowered in ways to maintain control over their lives and their health. Those with OAB (52%) and without symptoms (57%) feel more unsettled not knowing where to find the right information on a health issue than not knowing what to do with information they have. Consumers are increasingly aware that they must assume a greater role in their personal health, including bladder health but they need tools, strategies and support to assist them in becoming better informed. Websites written by experts are the number one resource for serious health conditions among women with (48%) and without OAB symptoms (53%).

### Concluding message

The survey found that symptoms of OAB, including frequent urination and urgency, make females more unsettled about their seeming lack of control over their health and their lives. Research on consumer beliefs and perceptions helps health educators and healthcare providers refine their understanding of what motivates or inhibits people in their health-seeking behaviour.

This knowledge can enhance our ability to engage with the consumer, with improved public health education initiatives that give consumers tools for making self-directed choices to better manage their mild to moderate symptoms of overactive bladder.

### Disclosures

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