

Key facts about managing bladder incontinence 1

What is the 'neurogenic' bladder?

This is where the nerves that send signals between the brain and the bladder do not work effectively. This happens to almost everybody with spina bifida.

Since the nerves do not work properly, bladder sensation is reduced and bladder emptying is affected. As a result, you may be incontinent.

For you to achieve bladder control, you need to understand a bit about the management issues related to the presence of this abnormal bladder function in spina bifida.

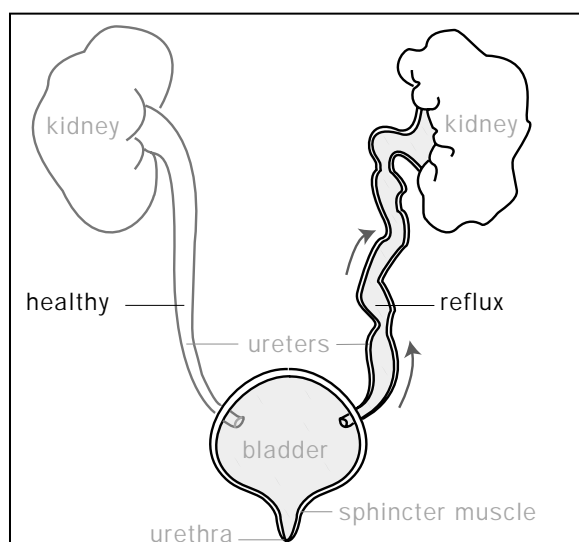
Effective bladder training depends upon the ability to feel the presence of urine in the bladder. Because of altered bladder sensation in spina bifida, you have decreased sensation. This interferes with your ability to stay dry.

What are the key characteristics of neurogenic bladder in spina bifida?

Typical characteristics are:

- not knowing when your bladder is full
- the bladder starts releasing urine when you don't want it to
- constantly 'dribbling' urine because the muscles that control the bladder are not strong enough.

Continence management is effectively working around these problems in a manner to give you maximum independence.



Contrast of healthy and neurogenic bladder in spina bifida.

Key facts about managing bladder incontinence 2

Why are people with spina bifida prone to urinary tract infections (UTI)?

In spina bifida, urine drains poorly and slowly from the bladder. Often the bladder is never completely empty, even though it leaks.

Usually, a urinary tract infection occurs because some urine stays in the bladder for too long and creates a perfect environment for the bacteria (bugs) which cause UTIs to grow.

UTIs must be managed quickly and effectively, usually with antibiotic tablets prescribed by your doctor. **Be sure to finish the course of tablets completely.**

If a UTI gets out of control, it can spread from the bladder up to the kidneys and cause a kidney infection, which is very serious. Significant, irreversible kidney damage can occur very quickly from such an infection.

Many people with spina bifida have 'bugs', which have become resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics. This will mean a more careful examination of which bug is present (by culturing a urine sample) and the prescribing of a less common antibiotic designed to kill the bug. The antibiotic may need to be given intravenously (via a drip in your arm).

What is urinary reflux?

This is when urine which has been made in the kidney and flows down into the bladder, goes back up again, due to incorrect functioning of your urinary system.

Reflux typically causes:

- a UTI
- the kidneys to become 'urine-logged' and not work effectively.
- kidney stones.

Reflux is serious if it goes on for too long. Effective management includes seeing a urinary specialist (urologist) regularly. This specialist will test to see if reflux is occurring.