Urinary incontinence, the accidental loss of urine, is often accompanied by urgency and increased frequency of urination. Urgency is the urgent need to urinate that often results in uncontrollable urine leakage before the person can reach the toilet. Increased frequency of urination can occur as a result of urgency or if the person toilets often to avoid urine leakage. All of these symptoms have a negative impact on an individual’s quality of life. They can interrupt a person’s activities of daily living causing feelings of anxiety and frustration. These symptoms can also lead to social isolation because many individuals will limit social activities to avoid the embarrassment that results from frequent toileting and urine leakage. Bladder retraining is a behavioral therapy that teaches a person to control urgency and frequency as well as improves bladder control.

When a person experiences the urgent need to urinate, their first instinct is to run to the bathroom. This rushing can actually increase the urgency and often results in uncontrollable urine leakage on the way to the toilet. Urgency leads to increased frequency of urination because the individual begins to fear that he or she will have urine leakage every time they feel the urge. Consequently, this fear causes the person to try to urinate every time they feel the slightest urge or see a bathroom. Frequently, they are unable to urinate or they urinate small amounts. Frequent urination results in a smaller bladder capacity because the bladder begins to send signals to the brain that it’s full at very low volumes. This pattern can also lead to increased episodes of urine leakage instead of preventing it. The goal of bladder retraining is to decrease or eliminate urgency and slowly increase the time between toileting without causing accidental urine leakage. Bladder retraining can actually calm an overactive bladder and decrease or eliminate incontinent episodes. Urine leakage can also occur if person urinates infrequently or waits too long to go. For this problem, the bladder needs to be retrained to urinate on demand at timed intervals rather than waiting for the urge, which can often be too late to avoid urine leakage.

Bladder retraining is accomplished by using behavioral methods that decrease urgency and frequency of urination as well as improve bladder control. These methods include developing toileting patterns that decrease frequency or prompt the person to void more frequently to avoid overflow incontinence. The person is also taught techniques to calm urgency and increase their ability to make it to the toilet without urine leakage. Pelvic muscle exercises are a component of bladder retraining as they increase the strength of the pelvic
floor muscles and improve their ability to control the flow of urine thereby decreasing or eliminating urgency and urine leakage. Through this therapy, the individual learns to control the act of urinating and regains the self-confidence to make it to the bathroom without the accidental loss of urine.

Bladder retraining can be a very effective means of improving bladder control and eliminating urgency and frequency of urination. When therapy goals are accomplished, the person regains the confidence that they can effectively control the act of urinating. They achieve a sense of accomplishment and improved self worth. They are again able to do the things they enjoy without the fear and embarrassment caused by urgency, frequency and the lack of bladder control. The result is an improved quality of life and ability to socialize. Bladder retraining is a simple, noninvasive method that has lasting effects in decreasing, often eliminating the symptoms associated with urinary incontinence.