



WHAT MAINSTREAM MEDICINE SAYS

Limit fluid intake before bedtime

Nocturia, or the need to wake up more than once a night to urinate, becomes more common as people age, said Dr Gerald Tan, a consultant urologist at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital.

This is usually accompanied by a greater need and frequency to urinate in the day time as well.

Older men also find the stream slowing and a feeling of incomplete emptying of the bladder.

With age-related changes in the brain, less of an anti-diuretic hormone – which is necessary for reducing urine output during sleep – is produced, Dr Tan explained.

With decreased concentration of this hormone, a person feels the urge to urinate at night.

Dr Tan said retirees also tend to drink more water than they did when they were busy working, which also increases the volume of urine and the possible need for urination at night.

One reason for the incomplete emptying of the bladder could be the weakening of the detrusor

muscle – the muscle in the bladder wall – due to ageing. Another reason could be chronic urinary tract infection, which makes urination painful. This causes the detrusor muscle to go into spasm, retaining urine in the bladder.

A third reason could be an overactive bladder, which is when the bladder muscle sends strong signals to the brain to trigger a voiding sensation before the bladder is full.

The cause may be unknown, a urinary tract infection or, in men, infection of the prostate or prostate enlargement.

Separately, prostate enlargement – often due to ageing – can also obstruct the bladder. When the prostate enlarges, it presses against the urethra – the tube that connects the bladder to the genitals – and may constrict the flow of urine.

Treating nocturia successfully requires correctly identifying its cause, said Dr Tan.

Patients with overactive bladders will benefit from medicine such as antimuscarinics to relax the bladder muscle, while those with prostate

enlargement may have the obstruction of the urethra relieved through medication or surgery.

Dr Tan said herbal remedies, including the Asiatic cornelian cherry fruit, are not used by doctors to treat nocturia, as there is no scientific evidence that they are effective in relieving the symptom.

He advised people with nocturia to consult a doctor if the symptom persists for more than two months.

In general, elderly patients should limit how much they drink in the evenings and empty their bladders before turning in for the night.

Dr Tan said: "Patients are advised to cut down on or avoid the consumption of tea, coffee and alcohol, as these contribute to increased urine production."

If medicine is required to treat overactive bladders or clear an obstruction caused by the prostate, patients need to be good about taking their medicine, he added.