

# **The Shy Bladder Syndrome: What Is It, Why Should You Care, and How Can You Be Helpful?**

**A Guide for All Professionals Who Work with Children**

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# Shy Bladder Syndrome (AKA Paruresis)

- **What is it?**
- **Definition:** Difficulty or inability to urinate in situations where others are present, are soon to be present, or when there is a perception of scrutiny by others.

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Concerns among individuals are varied:
  - Being seen
  - Being heard
  - The proximity of others
  - The familiarity of others in the bathroom
  - The type of urinal
  - Feeling pressured to hurried

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- With or without Subjective Anxiety
- Not a fear of contamination (As in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder)

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Severity of Symptoms on a Spectrum
- From Minor Nuisance To Totally Dominating an Individual's Life

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

Classification: In the DSM V, It is classified as Social Anxiety Disorder

- “Some individuals fear and avoid urinating in public restrooms when other individuals are present (i.e., paruresis, or “shy bladder syndrome”).

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Classification controversy: In one study, 75% of individuals with Paruresis did not meet criteria for Social Anxiety Disorder and vice versa.
- Some argue that it is a distinct psychological disorder

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Estimated Prevalence: Around 7% of the population
- Estimated to affect 2 million people in the United States, 220 million people worldwide



# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Most often has its onset in **adolescence**
- One small study showed most common age of onset between **ages 12-15** years

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- It appears to affect males and females at similar rates
- Symptoms may be a bit different between male and females
- Males are more likely to seek treatment

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Family History seems to be a risk factor
- Unclear if this is genetic transmission

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Course of illness over time is varied
- Intermittent Course > Stable Course > Improving Course > Worsening Course



# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Associated with Shame, Embarrassment, and Stigma!
- Many never receive treatment
- Average time from symptom onset to diagnosis= **14 years**

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- What causes it? Little is known for sure but here are the current theories:
- Trauma (bullying, teasing, over controlling parent)
- Behavioral factors (learned associations between going to the bathroom and anxious arousal)
- Cognitive Factors (unrealistic beliefs, distorted body image, etc.)

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Behavioral Learning: A vicious cycle of anxiety and avoidance
- Avoiding the situation relieves anxiety and reinforces the avoidance behavior



# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Proposed physical mechanism:
- **Increased adrenaline** and activation of sympathetic nervous system
- This produces **involuntary rise in the muscle tone** of external bladder sphincter and pelvic floor and inhibits bladder contraction
- Fear and Embarrassment → Decreased ability to relax the sphincter!

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Is there something wrong physically?
- Some preliminary evidence that some who suffer from Paruresis have pelvic floor dysfunction
- May be different subtypes of this disorder

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- **Why does it matter?**
- Decreased quality of life
- Negative effects on social life, school, work, career

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- Leads to negative coping behaviors:
- Restricting fluid intake
- Avoiding social activities (sleepovers, parties, theaters, malls, restaurants, travelling)

# Shy Bladder Syndrome

- In 10% of cases can lead to serious medical complications
- Urosepsis (a life threatening infection).

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Treatment

- The first step is to stop hiding it and share the secret!
- To get support from TRUSTED friends and loved ones
- To reduce anxiety
- To raise awareness for the condition

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Treatment

- Self Treatment methods can provide immediate relief
- The Breath-Holding Technique
  - \*must check with your doctor first, especially if cardiac issues
  - \*can induce panic attack in vulnerable individuals
  - \*can also relax the anal sphincter so watch out!

[Paruresis.org/breath-hold](http://Paruresis.org/breath-hold)

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Treatment

- Breath Holding Technique:
- Leads to build up of Carbon Dioxide in blood stream, then around the neck of bladder and then...

The muscles relax involuntarily!



# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Treatment

- Self Catheterization

- \*get a urologist to teach you how

- \*share information from [urologyhealth.org](http://urologyhealth.org) with skeptical urologists

# Shy Bladder Syndrome Treatment

From the Urology Care Foundation,

The Official Foundation of the **American Urological Association:**

“Catheterization leads to relief right away and a better quality of life.”

“The low risk for healthy people in using catheters far outweighs the harm of ongoing disruption of one’s life by shy bladder.”

# Shy Bladder Syndrome Treatment

- Medications: So far have not shown to be helpful
- May be a role for medications to help anxious or depressed patients to have easier time participating in psychotherapy

# Shy Bladder Syndrome Treatment

- Behavioral treatments
- Graded and repetitive exposure
- Workshops and support groups to help individuals practice together

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Treatment

- Desensitization Hierarchy Worksheet
- “Use this table to write down your own hierarchy. You should start at one (a situation where you can perform comfortably) and progress, in realistic and small steps, up to ten. Note: This will be one of several hierarchies needed to reach your eventual target.”
- From Shy Bladder Syndrome (Paruresis), an Update  
(Ebook available from [paruresis.org](http://paruresis.org))

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Treatment

- Cognitive Model:
- Draws on cognitive factors observed in other anxiety disorders
- Takes into account early life events that played a role in the formation of negative thoughts

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Negative Cognitions

- Beliefs about the meaning, probability and severity of negative evaluation from others
- Expecting others to be critical evaluators

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Negative Cognitions

- Unrealistic beliefs about “normal” amount of time it should take to begin urinating
- Exaggerated worries about privacy
- Distorted or poor body image



# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Negative Cognitions

- Belief that one will not be able to perform or won't perform well
- “The Micturition Double Blind”

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Negative Cognitions

- Other cognitive processes that can be targets for treatment
- Controlled treatment outcome studies to evaluate the effectiveness for the Cognitive Behavioral Model are needed

# Shy Bladder Syndrome:

## **How can you be helpful?**

Tips for helping children:

Listed under FAQ's at [Paruresis.org](http://Paruresis.org)

# SBS: Tips to Help Children

- **Praise them** for being brave enough to share what they are going through!

# SBS: Tips to Help Children

- Reassure them they aren't crazy, that nothing is seriously wrong and that recovery is very likely
- If they are being bullied, help them deal with it  
(and do not be over controlling around toileting)

# SBS: Tips to Help Children

- May need special arrangements at school and in other settings
- Consider the setting where you work

# SBS: Tips to Help Children and Teens

- Encourage them to participate in social activities and other school activities to avoid isolation!
- If activities require urine drug testing, advocate for school to accept alternative drug test method

# SBS: Tips to Help Children and Teens

- Recommend that the child see a child psychologist who specializes in Cognitive Behavioral Health and Anxiety disorders.
- Workshops through the International Paralysis Association (IPA) are approved for ages 17 years and up.

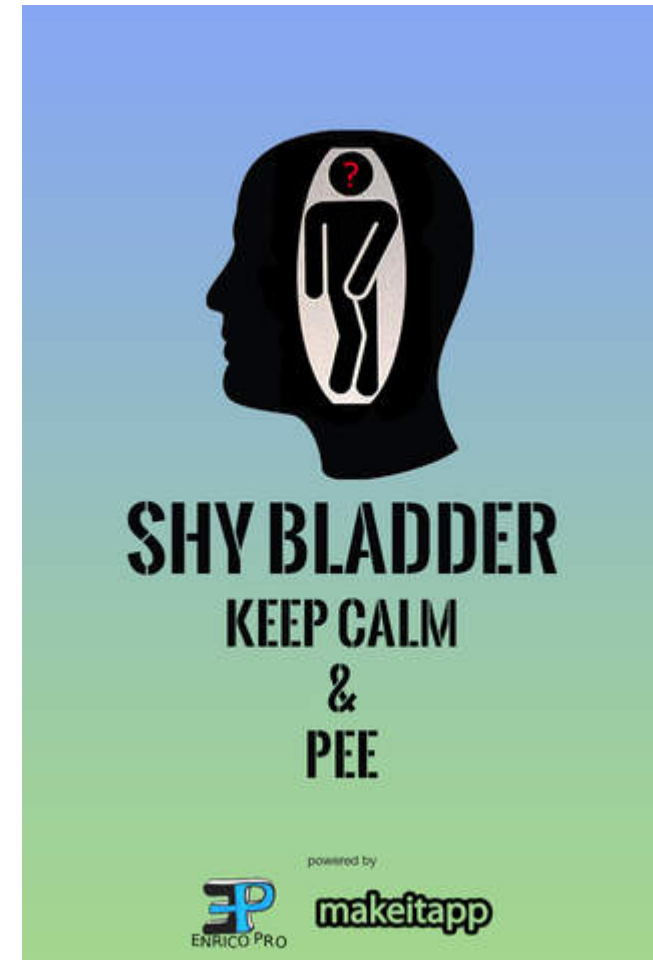


# SBS: Tips to Help Children and Teens

- Make sure they are drinking **plenty of water** and hydrating appropriately to avoid dehydration and serious medical consequences.

# Shy Bladder Syndrome: Helpful Resources

- Paruresis.org
- <http://www.urologyhealth.org>
- <http://www.shybladdersyndrome.org>



# Shy Bladder: Sketch comedy

- Video

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