Gotta Go? By Amy McKerrow, MD
Urologist at Urology Associates

Today, approximately 33.3 million persons in the United States, or 16.3 percent of our population, struggle with the problem of overactive bladder. As many as 50 percent of those over the age of 75 can experience significant symptoms. Overactive bladder includes symptoms of urinary urgency, the inability to postpone urination, frequent urination (sometimes as often as several times per hour and throughout the night) and leakage of urine requiring wearing of pads or changing of clothes. For many people, finding a public restroom when they need one can be a challenge. These conditions can be bothersome, embarrassing, and sometimes debilitating, to a point where a person may not want to leave their home.

TV commercials expose the public to many different treatment options for overactive bladder. The accepted treatment options are behavioral therapy (training of the bladder), biofeedback (also known as muscle rehabilitation with physiotherapy), medications, injection of botulinum toxin (Botox) into the bladder, bladder surgery, and nerve stimulation strategies including peripheral tibial nerve stimulation (PTNS) and InterStim. The goal of treating someone with overactive bladder is choosing a therapy that will effectively treat the problem with few side effects. Often patients have struggled with the problem for many years before seeking help because they are embarrassed or do not believe there are successful treatments.

When more conservative measures fail, including medications, there are other treatment avenues available for urgency and leakage of urine and fecal incontinence. Recently, Urology Associates has been focusing on neurostimulation, or regulating the signals sent between the bladder, bowel and brain. Neurostimulation treatments have been offered at Urology Associates in the outpatient surgical center, a thin wire electrode is placed into the sacrum (the base of the vertebral column) and hooked to a stimulator the patient wears on their waist. If there is a good response to the trial period, a permanent stimulator and wire are placed. InterStim therapy was approved by the Federal Drug Agency in 1997 and has an excellent track record of success. It is suitable for many patients, even those who feel they are at the end of the line for treatment options. Not only does InterStim treat urinary frequency and urinary incontinence, but it is also indicated for urinary retention, or inability to urinate, in certain cases. Most recently, InterStim was approved for fecal or bowel incontinence. Sometimes, people are not even aware the leakage is occurring. Studies have shown success rates of between 50-79 percent depending on the type of incontinence. For men and women, the use of InterStim has been one of the more successful treatments for those struggling with incontinence.


Dr. Amy McKerrow is a Board-Certified Urologist at Urology Associates and has practiced in Kalispell and Whitefish for eight years. She has a general urology practice and takes a special interest in urinary incontinence. Along with Kim Corino, certified physician assistant, and Marla Worthington, certified medical assistant and special procedure clinician, she offers an entire spectrum of treatment options for overactive bladder.