PARURESIS CURE

SECOND EDITION

The Paruresis Cure System

Take back control from bladder shyness with a practical, step-by-step plan.

Exposure ladder | Calming tools | Worksheets

Dr. Anum Khan

MBBS; M.D.

with **Paruresis Cure**

The Paruresis Cure System, Second Edition

Original edition by Dr. Anum Khan, MBBS; M.D.
Second edition revised and expanded by Paruresis Cure.

Copyright © 2018, 2026 Paruresis Cure LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews or articles.

Published by Paruresis Cure LLC · PO Box 410146 · Saint Louis, MO 63141
paruresiscure.com · info@paruresiscure.com

Medical disclaimer

This book is self-help education. It is not medical advice and does not replace an examination, diagnosis or treatment by a qualified health professional. Everyone is different, and no book can promise a particular result.

Before you start, talk to a doctor if your symptoms are new, if you have trouble urinating even when you are completely alone, or if you have pain, burning, blood in your urine, a weak or interrupted stream at home, or any other urinary symptom. These can be signs of a physical problem that needs medical care.

Get urgent medical help if you cannot urinate at all for several hours, or if you have a painful, very full bladder that you cannot empty.

Some exercises in this book, including the breath-hold technique and fluid practice, are not suitable for everyone. Read the safety notes with each exercise and check with your doctor if you have a heart, lung, kidney, liver or blood pressure condition, are pregnant, or have ever fainted.

Using the information in this book is your choice and your responsibility. The authors and publisher are not liable for any loss or harm resulting from its use.

A note on this edition

The first edition of this book was written by Dr. Anum Khan. This second edition keeps the heart of the original: paruresis is real, it is not your fault, and it improves with steady, step-by-step practice. The RIDE technique and the Red Sock relaxation are still here. Almost everything else has been rebuilt:

- **Twelve short chapters, one for each week.** The book now follows the same twelve weeks as the Paruresis Cure Program, so you read one chapter, then practice it that week.
- **A more up-to-date way to practice.** Instead of waiting for your anxiety to drop, you test a specific worry and see what actually happens. Recent research suggests this works at least as well as the older method and takes less time per practice.
- **Honest about the evidence.** We tell you what is well supported, what is promising and what is still unproven, so you know what to expect.
- **Written for everyone,** men and women, with clear safety guidance on when to see a doctor.

The revisions in this edition were made by the Paruresis Cure team.

How to use this book

1. **One chapter a week.** Each chapter matches one week of the 12-week program. Read it at the start of the week. It takes about 15 minutes.
2. **Do this week's practice.** Every chapter ends with a short practice plan. That's where change happens. Reading alone won't do much.
3. **Log it.** Use the Practice Card in the Appendix or the practice log in the app. Writing it down is part of how your brain learns.
4. **Go at your own pace.** If a week takes two weeks, that's fine. Stay with it until it feels doable, then move on.

> **Using the app?** Look for the *This week in the app* box at the end of each chapter. It tells you exactly what to tap, log and practice. If you're not using the app, the worksheets in the Appendix do the same job on paper.

Some days won't go to plan. That's expected, and Week 6 shows you what to do. Every practice counts, including the ones where nothing happens.

Contents

Week 1: Understand Your Shy Bladder 5

Week 2: Calm Your Body 8

Week 3: Change the Story in Your Head 11

Week 4: First Steps Out 13

Week 5: Climb the Ladder 16

Week 6: Handling Setbacks 18

Week 7: Mix It Up 20

Week 8: Closer Quarters 22

Week 9: Into Busy Places 24

Week 10: Real Life: Travel, Work and Events 26

Week 11: Your Bad-Day Plan 29

Week 12: Graduation 31

Frequently Asked Questions 33

Appendix: Worksheets, Quick-Reference Card and Guided Scripts 35

When to Get Medical Help, Resources and References 42

WEEK 1

Understand Your Shy Bladder

Paruresis, also called shy bladder, is trouble urinating when other people are nearby, or when you worry they might hear you, see you or be waiting. It's common, it's real, and it improves with practice.

You're not alone

The only systematic review estimates that about 3 to 16 people in every 100 have it, depending on how it's defined and measured. Even at the low end, that's millions of people. Men and women both have it. Most people never tell anyone, so it feels rarer than it is.

For some people it only shows up at a busy urinal. For others it shapes their whole life. In one clinical survey, about half the people with paruresis had turned down a job because of it, and a third avoided dating. Many people live with it for decades before they get help. If that sounds familiar, you're in the right place.

The term was first used in 1954 by the researchers Williams and Degenhardt. It's a recognized condition, and it's officially classed under social anxiety, though some researchers see it as its own condition. It is not a character flaw.

What happens in your body

To urinate, your bladder muscle squeezes while the muscles around the urethra (the sphincters) relax. The calm side of your nervous system runs this. When you feel watched, rushed or judged, the "fight or flight" side switches on. One of the things it does is keep those muscles shut. From your body's point of view, emptying your bladder during a threat makes no sense.

So, with paruresis, **your bladder usually works normally.** The stress response is the blocker. That's why you can go easily at home and not at all at a busy restroom. It's also why pushing harder doesn't work: pressure makes the block stronger.

What makes it harder

- **Being heard:** quiet restrooms, a bathroom next to the living room.

- **Being seen:** urinals with no dividers, gaps around stall doors.
- **How close people are:** fine five spaces away, impossible at the next one.
- **Time pressure:** someone waiting, the worry that you're "taking too long."
- **Who it is:** some people find it harder with coworkers, friends or family.

Why it sticks around: the avoidance loop

An uncomfortable moment leads to worry about next time. Worry makes the next try harder. So you start avoiding: waiting for an empty restroom, going far away, drinking less, skipping events. Avoiding brings relief, but it teaches your brain that restrooms really are dangerous, and the fear grows. This program breaks that loop, one small step at a time.

Check in with yourself

Take the self-check in the Appendix (Worksheet 1). It's 12 quick questions. Write down your score. You'll take it again in Weeks 6 and 12 to see how far you've come.

Then make your **situation list** (Worksheet 2): every place you might need to urinate away from complete privacy, rated from 0 (no worry) to 10 (the most anxious you can imagine). Include the places you avoid. For example: home with family nearby, a friend's house, a café's single restroom, a stall at work, a busy stadium.

Finally, list your **safety behaviors**, the things you do to cope or avoid. For example: waiting until the restroom is empty, always using a stall, flushing to cover sound, running the tap, wearing earbuds, cutting back on drinks, leaving events early. You don't have to change these yet. Just notice them. You'll start dropping them in Week 7.

Check this first. Paruresis is usually anxiety-related, but please see a doctor before starting if any of these are true:

- You have trouble starting, or a weak or stop-start stream, *even when you're alone at home.*
- You have pain, burning, blood in your urine, fever or frequent urinary infections.
- You often feel your bladder hasn't fully emptied.
- It started suddenly or recently, or after a new medication.
- You have a heart, lung, kidney, liver or blood pressure condition, or you're pregnant.

Some medicines, including certain antihistamines, decongestants, antidepressants and opioid pain medicines, can make it harder to go. Don't stop a prescribed medicine on your own, but do ask your prescriber.
Get urgent care if you can't urinate at all for several hours, or your bladder is painfully full.

What to expect from this program

We'll be straight with you. There are no randomized trials of paruresis treatment yet. The evidence we have (case studies, workshop follow-ups and one controlled study) all points the same way: many people who practice step by step improve, usually gradually and partly rather than all at once. The same methods are strongly supported for social anxiety. So we can't promise a result, but you're using the best-supported approach there is.

This week's practice

1. Take the self-check (Worksheet 1) and write down your score.
2. Write your situation list and rate each one from 0 to 10.
3. List your safety behaviors.
4. Do the medical check above, and book a doctor's visit if needed.

This week in the app: complete your Week 1 check-in, log your self-check score, and add your situations to your ladder list. Turn on your daily reminder.

In a nutshell: Paruresis is your body's stress response blocking the flow, not a broken bladder. Avoidance keeps it going. Practice, step by step, breaks the loop.

WEEK 2

Calm Your Body

This week you'll learn a few ways to bring your body's stress level down. They're useful in daily life and before practice. Just as important, you'll learn how to use them so they help you rather than become a new crutch.

Slow breathing

A long, slow out-breath is a simple way to help your body settle. Research on slow breathing shows modest but real reductions in stress and anxiety.

1. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4.
2. Breathe out slowly for a count of 6, as if through a straw.
3. Repeat for 2 to 5 minutes.

Practice it once a day when you're calm, for example on the bus or before bed. A skill you've practiced is much easier to use when you're nervous.

The Red Sock relaxation

This short body scan is based on a simple idea: it's hard to stay tense when your muscles are loose. Practice it at home this week. A guided script you can record is in the Appendix.

1. **Eyes and face:** soften your eyes, smooth your forehead.
2. **Jaw:** unclench your teeth and let your jaw hang a little.
3. **Neck and shoulders:** roll them gently, squeeze your shoulder blades together for 5 seconds, then let go.
4. **Arms and chest:** squeeze your fists and arms for 5 seconds, then release.
5. **Belly:** let it soften. Don't hold it in.
6. **Hips, thighs and buttocks:** notice any clenching and let it go. These muscles sit close to your pelvic floor.
7. **Feet:** imagine warmth flowing down your legs into your feet, like pulling on warm red socks.

Quick version (15 seconds): soft eyes, loose jaw, shoulders down, soft belly, unclench, long slow out-breath.

The breath-hold: an optional aid

The breath-hold technique is popular in the paruresis community. You breathe out most of your air, then hold, and some people find the flow starts during the hold. It hasn't been formally studied, so treat it as something to try, not a proven method.

> **Safety first.** Check with a doctor before trying it if you have a heart or lung condition, high or low blood pressure, panic attacks, are pregnant, or have ever fainted. Stop and breathe normally if you feel dizzy or unwell. Practice sitting or lying down at first, and never while driving, swimming or anywhere fainting could be dangerous. Because it can relax all the pelvic muscles, use a stall when you try it for real.

1. **Practice the hold at home** (one to two weeks): breathe in normally, breathe out until about 20 to 25% of your air is left, hold for 5 seconds, then breathe normally. Add a few seconds each day while it stays comfortable, up to about 40 seconds.
2. **Try it in your bathroom at home** when you need to go: breathe out, hold, and let the flow start. Keep holding a few seconds after it starts, then breathe normally.

Use these tools the smart way

Some research on anxiety suggests that when people use relaxation to *make the fear go away* during practice, it can become a safety behavior: the brain decides, "I was only okay because I relaxed." That can make progress slower and less lasting.

So use these tools like this:

- **Daily, for general stress:** great, keep it up.
- **Before practice, to settle in:** fine.
- **As a physical aid to help the muscles release:** fine, especially the quick version and the breath-hold.
- **As a must-have:** watch out. If you'd refuse to try without it, it's become a crutch. Over the coming weeks you'll practice sometimes with it and sometimes without, until you don't need it.

This week's practice

1. Slow breathing: 2 to 5 minutes, once a day.
2. The full Red Sock relaxation on at least 4 days.
3. If it's safe for you, start step 1 of the breath-hold.
4. Notice, without changing anything yet, which situations on your list feel hardest and why.

This week in the app: tick Breathe in your Daily 5 each day you do your slow breathing or Red Sock relaxation.

In a nutshell: Calm-body skills are useful, but they're helpers, not requirements. The goal is to be able to go with or without them.

END OF FREE PREVIEW

Ready for the step-by-step plan?

You've read the first two weeks. The full edition gives you all twelve, one short chapter a week, each matched to a week of the 12-week program:

- Turning your fears into predictions you can test, with the Practice Card
- Your ladder: how to build it, when to move on, and what to do when the flow doesn't start
- Setbacks, closer quarters, busy places, travel, work and drug tests
- Your bad-day plan, graduation, worksheets and guided scripts

Get the full ebook

The complete 44-page second edition, with a 30-day money-back guarantee.
paruresiscure.com/product/paruresis-cure-system-ebook

Or try Week 1 of the 12-week program free

Seven days in the private app, with daily steps and a practice log. No card needed.
paruresiscure.com/program/week-1