

# INCONTINENCE & BLADDER CONTROL



Bladder incontinence (or urine leakage) is a common and distressing condition. Nearly a million people in Australia have some form of incontinence. While often



thought of as something that happens to older people, or to women after childbirth, incontinence can affect anyone at any age. Incontinence is avoidable, however. It can be prevented, treated and managed. Treatments include using simple exercises and bladder training programs.

Incontinence is when people find they can't control their bladder and they leak at awkward moments.

There are different types of incontinence.

## Urge incontinence

is due to over-active contractions of the bladder muscles. These contractions give the person a strong urge to urinate and they may not reach the toilet in time. It may be triggered by a bladder infection, stress, anxiety, a spinal injury, an obstruction (e.g. constipation, enlarged prostate in men), diabetes, stroke and other causes.

## Stress incontinence

is due to weak pelvic floor muscles, the muscles that support the bladder. Urine leakage occurs with sudden exertion (e.g. a cough, sneeze, exercise, laughing, lifting). The muscle weakness may be associated with a chronic cough, pregnancy, obesity, constipation or some medicines.

## Overflow incontinence

Some conditions of the nervous system, poor muscle contraction, as well as obstructions (e.g. constipation, enlarged prostate in men) make it difficult for the bladder to empty properly and it becomes too full. This causes pressure to build up.

The pressure in the bladder becomes greater than the pressure needed to hold the urine in, forcing it to dribble out.

Other types of incontinence include reflex, transient, functional incontinence and childhood bedwetting.

## IMPORTANT

Incontinence is a symptom, not a disease. It is important for you to find out what condition is causing this symptom. Ask your doctor to help you find out why you have the problem. You may then be referred to a specialist, continence adviser or a continence clinic. **Incontinence can, and should be treated.**

## Treatment

Incontinence can be treated. Pelvic floor exercises and bladder training are effective treatments in most cases. Medicines may also be used. If surgery is needed, new techniques mean that most people can have their incontinence managed.

## SELF CARE

Although incontinence can be treated, it will not get better by itself. Get help from your doctor, physiotherapist or continence adviser. Be positive and remember it may take time for the treatment to work. You may need to retrain your bladder.

### Lifestyle

- Learn to do pelvic floor exercises and practice them regularly throughout the day (see *Pelvic Floor Exercises* Fact Card).
- Drink 6 - 8 glasses a day to maintain bladder capacity, avoid dehydration and bladder irritation. Check with your doctor if you have kidney or heart problems.
- Only have small amounts of drinks which contain caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, cola). Drink less in the evening so you don't have to get up at night.
- Keep to your ideal weight (see *Weight Control* Fact Card).
- Wear airy, loose fitting clothing.
- Improve your general fitness (e.g. by walking, swimming).
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Prevent constipation with a high fibre diet (see *Fibre* Fact Card).
- Quit smoking. Smoker's cough may aggravate some forms of incontinence (see *Smoking* Fact Cards).
- Learn to relax. Tension can affect bladder control (see *Relaxation Techniques* Fact Card).
- Don't ignore the problem or simply put it down to old age or having babies.
- Resist going to the toilet frequently "just in case". This can lead to the bladder sending the "visit the toilet" signals too often.
- Don't use talcum powder in the genital area, as it can irritate the skin.

## Aids and medicines

- Use a barrier cream to prevent soreness. Ask your pharmacist.
- Use incontinence aids (e.g. absorbent pads, pants and sheets). Ask your pharmacist.
- Wash with soap and water each time you change wet pads or clothing. Dry well.
- Rinse out and soak soiled clothing in cold water with nappy wash solution in a covered bucket.
- Use mobility aids such as commodes, toilet rails etc.
- Have bladder infections treated promptly. Find out the cause if infections occur again.
- Understand your medicines. Check with your doctor or pharmacist about what effect they have on the bladder.

### Recommended reading:

CHIARELLI, P  
*Women's Waterworks*  
Gore & Osment, 1992

MILLARD, RJ  
*Bladder Control - a simple self-help guide*  
MacLennan & Petty, 1995

### Other relevant Fact Cards:

- *Pelvic Floor Exercises*
- *Fibre*
- *Smoking cards*
- *Weight Control*
- *Relaxation Techniques*

### Contact:

**Your doctor** - listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

### Continence Foundation of Australia:

National Continence Helpline - 1800 330 066  
[www.contfound.org.au](http://www.contfound.org.au)

### Your Self Care pharmacist. To find:

ACT	(02) 6283 4703	NSW	(02) 9437 5941
TAS	(03) 6231 2636	VIC	(03) 9903 9600
QLD	(07) 3844 4900	WA	(08) 9388 2886
SA	(08) 8272 1211		

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Your **Self Care** pharmacist

KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN

DAVID S. NOLTE PHARMACY 701 - 703 RATHDOWNE ST., NTH CARLTON PH: 9349 1522 • 3049L

