

What is Urinary
Incontinence?





What is urinary incontinence?

'Urinary incontinence' are words used to describe losing control of your bladder and wetting yourself. This includes being damp or soaked.

This is not normal. It is always a sign of an underlying problem. Bladder control problems can usually be greatly improved, treated or possibly cured.

Seek help now.

Diabetes warning:

If you are always feeling thirsty and having to urinate (pass water or wee) all the time, tell the doctor or the health worker. It is important that you are checked to make sure diabetes (sugar sickness) is not the problem.

Who is at risk?

One in 10 Australians is affected by urinary incontinence (have a leaky bladder).

It affects people socially, emotionally, physically, mentally and economically.

Women are more likely to be affected than men.

In older age groups, incontinence tends to be both more common and more severe,





happening in up to 4 out of 10 people over 75 years of age.

Bed-wetting is also common in children and teenagers which can be embarrassing and stressful for the child and their family.

In spite of the large number of people with incontinence and the range of treatments available, the negative attitudes that people have about bladder control problems can make a person with this problem feel isolated. This may cause a person to feel alone and alienated from family and friends for fear of shame and embarrassment.

Remember that help is available.

What is the cause?


Doctors put incontinence into 5 different categories. Your doctor, health worker or continence adviser may describe your incontinence as one of the following:

- stress incontinence;
- urge incontinence;
- overflow incontinence;
- functional incontinence; or
- reflex incontinence.

Stress incontinence

Small amounts of urine (water or wee) leak when you cough, sneeze, laugh, strain, lift or





play sport. Stress incontinence occurs mainly in women who have had natural childbirth and sometimes in men, mostly after prostate surgery.

Urge incontinence


Leaked urine with a sudden strong need to urinate. This may be due to sickness such as stroke, an enlarged prostate gland, Parkinson's Disease, constipation (not being able to or having difficulty doing goona or cooney) or simply because of a long history of poor bladder habits. In some cases the cause is not known.

Overflow incontinence

Where the bladder does not empty completely, urine loss may happen when you don't want it to. In men this is most commonly due to an enlarged prostate gland causing an obstruction which blocks the flow of urine. A weak bladder muscle can also mean the bladder does not empty completely.

Functional incontinence

This is the result of a physical, mental or environmental problem that affects the person's ability to reach or use the toilet in time. Not being able to move around easily, problems with use of hands, loss of memory or even poor building design, can have this effect.





Reflex incontinence

The loss of urine control because of damage to the nerves which control the bladder. This is most commonly found in people with spinal cord injuries.


Treatment

Treatment for all these problems will depend on a proper diagnosis.

Diagnosis

A doctor, health worker or continence adviser trained in this area will make a diagnosis. It will involve taking a full verbal history first that is, your general health, what illnesses you have had, what medicines you are taking, if you have had any operations. This will point to certain areas or illnesses that may need to be looked at more closely.

Who can help?

- Your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service.
 - Doctors.
 - A special continence adviser.
 - National Continence Helpline Freecall™ **1800 33 00 66**.
 - Visit the website at www.bladderbowel.gov.au or the National Public Toilet Map website at www.toiletmap.gov.au
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Remember

- You are not alone. Incontinence can be prevented, better managed, treated and sometimes cured.







Other brochures in this series:

- Contenance Myths and Facts
- Bladder Training
- What is Urinary Incontinence
- Good Bladder Training for Everyone
- What is a Contenance Assessment
- Contenance Products and Appliances
- Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men
- Bladder Problems and the Prostate
- Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women
- Dementia and Urinary Incontinence
- A List of Ten Frequently Asked Questions
- Constipation
- Contenance Comic



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