


# Continence: Myths and Facts






# Get the facts about incontinence

Incontinence is the name for bladder and bowel problems which make us lose control and wet or dirty ourselves. This happens because of difficulty in storing urine (water or wee) in the bladder or emptying the bladder or bowel.

## Myth 1: Incontinence is not a common condition

**Fact:** It is a very common problem.

- More than 2 million Australians have a leaky bladder.
  - It is a hidden condition because many people are too embarrassed to speak openly about it.
  - Both men and women have this condition.
  - At least 1 in every 20 younger Australians has it.
  - Around 1 in every 5 older Australians has it.
  - This condition costs a lot – for individuals and governments. Costs include pads and equipment and, where people cannot look after themselves due to a combination of their medical condition and severe incontinence, hostel or nursing home care.
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## Myth 2: It is a simple condition

**Fact:** It is not simple. There are many different causes and many different treatments.

- Women often have incontinence because their pelvic floor (inside) muscles are damaged in childbirth.
- Menopause or change of life can make it worse.
- Older men can get it because of prostate problems.
- Too much coughing from chest infections or smoking can weaken your pelvic floor muscles and give you a leaky bladder.
- It can be a side effect of diabetes (sugar sickness) or obesity (too much weight).
- People with spinal cord injuries may have incontinence.

If you have incontinence, it can be made worse by:

- Getting colds and constant coughing.
- Poor diet making you constipated (not being able to or having difficulty doing goona or cooney) can cause a leaky bladder and problems with your bowel.
- Having too much caffeine in your diet (drinking lots of coffee and cola drinks).





- Being overweight – this can make it hard for your body to cope.
- Having other problems that make it hard for you to get to the toilet fast.
- Medicines – sometimes medication can cause incontinence as a side effect.

**Myth 3: It is an inevitable result of getting old**

**Fact: Getting older does not cause bladder and bowel problems.**

- Damage and disease cause incontinence.
- A leaky bladder or bowel is never normal in anyone over 5 years of age although it is more common in older people.

Don't just accept it. Get advice and help so you can have a better life.


**Myth 4: There is no treatment or help**

**Fact: There is treatment that can improve incontinence and there is good advice on how to manage it better.**

The first step is to get a proper assessment and advice.

There may be a special continence clinic in your area.





Make sure that you get a proper assessment.

If you are a man and you want to speak to a man about your condition, let people know this when you are making your appointment or go to a men's clinic if there is one in your area. If you are a woman and you want to speak to a woman about your condition let people know this when you are making your appointment.


Take a family member or friend with you for support if that helps you feel more comfortable.

Read the brochure called 'What is a Continence Assessment'. This will help you know what to expect and tell you how to make sure it works best for you.

There are other brochures in this series which may help.

## **Remember**

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





### **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 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](http://www.bladderbowel.gov.au) or the National Public Toilet Map website at [www.toiletmap.gov.au](http://www.toiletmap.gov.au)





## 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



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health and Ageing**

This series of brochures has been developed and funded as part of the Australian Government's National Contenance Management Strategy (NCMS).

**All artwork created by Georgina Altona and Warwick Keen**