

A List of Ten  
Frequently Asked  
Questions





## 1. What is incontinence?

Incontinence is trouble controlling your bladder or bowel where you may wet yourself or dirty yourself.

## 2. What causes incontinence?

Incontinence can happen when:

- the brain is not able to control the bladder properly (for example being drunk, diabetes (sugar sickness) or having dementia);
- the bladder tries to empty when it shouldn't because the muscle of the bladder is over active. This is 'urgency' or feels like needing to go now;
- the muscles that hold the urine in don't work well enough. This is called 'stress incontinence';
- there is something stopping the urine getting out the way it normally does, like an enlarged prostate gland or constipation (not being able to or having difficulty doing goona or cooney), or
- there is some barrier that stops you getting to the toilet. The toilet might be locked or you might have difficulty walking. There are lots of other reasons why you might not be able to get to the toilet.

Sometimes more than one of these can happen at the same time.





### 3. How do we stay continent (able to store urine)?

The kidneys make urine and it gets to the bladder through a couple of tubes called urethras. The bladder is made up of muscle but normally it is relaxed and so it fills with urine. While it is filling, muscles around the base of the bladder are tight and hold the urine in. Most adults can feel when they have half a cup of urine in their bladder. When they have 1½ or 2 cups of urine in their bladder, they will want to get to a toilet. When they find a place to go and are ready the muscles around the base of the bladder relax to let the urine out. The urine doesn't just flow out your body actually pushes it out. To keep these muscles working well you should do pelvic floor exercises regularly. (See brochure on Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women and Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men)

### 4. How common is incontinence?

Nearly 1 in 10 Australians is urine incontinent. Nearly 1 in 20 Australians is faecally (goona or cooney) incontinent.






## 5. Is incontinence more common in men or women?

Incontinence is more common in women. In women, it's mainly to do with having children and getting weak pelvic floor muscles so that the urine comes out when you laugh or cough or sneeze or run or jump.

In men, it is mainly to do with the prostate gland getting bigger and blocking off the flow of urine so that you can't control the urine in the normal way.

## 6. I'm OK now. How can I stop myself getting incontinent later?

- Find out about incontinence.
  - Practice 'good bladder habits'.
  - Drink enough water (at least 8 cups of water a day).
  - Avoid constipation (not being able to or having difficulty doing goona or cooney.)
  - Don't go to the toilet when you don't need to.
  - Go to the 'Well Health Days' and find out more.
  - Pelvic floor exercises are a good way for everyone to prevent problems.
  - Keep yourself generally active and healthy.
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7. I'm an old woman.  
Is incontinence normal?

No. Incontinence is not normal for anyone of any age over 5 years old.

8. There's nothing that can be done. Why should I bother?


Everyone can be better managed, treated and sometimes cured. You don't have to put up with it.

9. Where can I get equipment free or cheap?

You should talk to your health worker or continence adviser about this.

**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 you are checked to make sure diabetes (sugar sickness) is not the problem.





## 10.1 have a continence problem now. What can I do?

Go to see or talk to someone who can help.

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)

Talk about it. Don't put up with it.



## 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 Habits for Everyone
- What is a Contenance Assessment
- Contenance Products and Appliances
- Constipation and Urinary Incontinence
- Pelvic Floor Exercises for Men
- Bladder Problems and the Prostate
- Pelvic Floor Exercises for Women
- Dementia and Urinary Incontinence
- Constipation
- Contenance Comic



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