

What is a Continence
Assessment?





What is a Continence Assessment?

This brochure is to help people who are going to have a continence assessment.

To understand more about incontinence (not being able to control your water, wee, goona or cooney) you should read the other brochures in this series:

- ‘Incontinence Myths and Facts’; and
- ‘Bladder Training’.


A continence assessment is an interview and physical examination by a doctor or a specially trained health worker. When you go for the assessment you will be asked to take a bladder chart with you (see the brochure in this series – ‘Bladder Training’).


Everyone is entitled to an individual assessment which should be done in a sensitive manner with respect for the person’s privacy and right to refuse care.

Remember

If you are a man and you want a man to do your assessment, let people know this when you are arranging your appointment or go to a men’s clinic if there is one in your area.

If you are a woman and you want a woman to do your assessment, let the people know this when you are arranging your appointment.






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

The assessment

You will be asked about your diet, weight, medical history and your general health. You may also be asked questions that you may think are strange. This is because incontinence is usually a symptom of another medical condition.

Some of the unusual questions could be:

- How much alcohol or caffeine do you drink?
This is because drinking lots of alcohol or caffeine based drinks like coffee and cola drinks can irritate the bladder and so can eating large amounts of chocolate.
 - Are you constipated? Not being able to or having difficulty passing faeces (goona or cooney).
 - If you are a woman, you may be asked if you have any children and the type of birth. Having just one child can damage bladder control.
 - Are you going through menopause?
Hormone changes can affect incontinence.
 - Are you on any medications? Medicines can have a major effect on bladder and bowel functions.
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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.

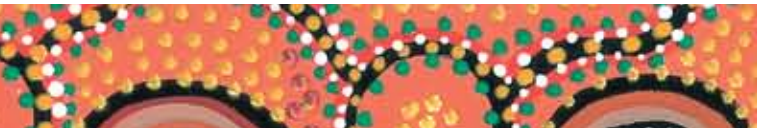
Diagnosis


The doctor or specially trained health worker will make a diagnosis after they have interviewed you, completed a physical examination and received the results of any other tests that have been required. This information is necessary because it will indicate certain areas or conditions that may need to be more closely examined and what treatments would be most helpful. On the list below are some of the tools a specially trained health worker, continence adviser or doctor may use.

1. A bladder chart to record the times you went to the toilet, how much urine you passed and how much leakage there was before you went. This would show how severe the incontinence is you are experiencing.
 2. A urine test to see if your bladder is emptying properly. This is a test to measure what is left in the bladder after a normal attempt to empty the bladder. This is done by ultrasound and is a painless procedure.
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3. A physical examination, in which the bladder is checked externally, then an internal vaginal or rectal examination is made if it is necessary, and you agree to it. The health worker will use their fingers for the examination in most instances. Instruments are not used.

An internal examination would check for:

- the strength of the pelvic muscles;
 - prolapses;
 - enlarged prostate; and
 - signs of cancer.
4. A urine sample may be taken and sent to a pathology lab for tests. This would identify any urinary tract infection and indicate the most appropriate medication or treatment.
 5. If a man's prostate is enlarged and the doctor is concerned after doing the urine test, he may request a blood test which can identify if the prostate is malignant.
 6. Urodynamics – is a special test where your bladder is filled up with water. The pressure in the bladder is measured. You will be asked to cough and strain and to wash your hands in cold water to test exactly what is wrong with your bladder. If you 'leak' during the test – don't feel embarrassed – it is only water coming away and the specialist will then learn what is going wrong with your bladder.
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You will be asked to empty your bladder on a special toilet to see if the bladder empties properly. This test takes 20 minutes. It is not painful but it might feel a bit strange. You should drink plenty of water just after the test to wash out your bladder.

7. Ultrasound. An ultrasound examination may be made during the urodynamic test to give extra information about how your bladder works. This takes a picture of your bladder and is not uncomfortable. The probe of the ultrasound is placed underneath where your urine comes out and you will be asked to cough and strain. This takes only 5 minutes.

Remember

No matter which type of test the health worker, continence adviser or doctor suggests you have done, it is your right to ask why they are recommending you have the test. You have the right to know what you will be asked to do if you do have the test, how the test will be done, if it is to be internal or external, what instruments (if any) will be used and who will be doing it.





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

Other brochures in this series:

- Continence Myths and Facts
- Bladder Training
- What is Urinary Incontinence
- Good Bladder Training for Everyone
- What is a Continence Assessment
- Continence 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
- Continence Comic



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

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All artwork created by Georgina Altona and Warwick Keen.