



**Amigos de la Gente de Edad**

## **Help with continence**

People of all ages can suffer from incontinence - that is the loss of bladder or bowel control. However, many incontinence problems can be resolved or helped. Although it may be more difficult to manage without some advice and assistance as you grow older, advice from the right person can help. This Infosheet aims to help you to understand a little more about incontinence, to encourage the promotion of continence and to suggest where to find further help.

The Infosheet will look at:

- Why you should seek help
- Different ways in which incontinence may affect you
- What help may be available
- Advice services and telephone helplines
- Leaflets and publications

### **Why you should seek help**

Incontinence has many causes. Many types of incontinence can be treated or cured. This is why it is so important to find out why continence has become a problem for you or the person you look after.

Incontinence is not a 'normal' part of ageing, although it may happen to people as they grow older. With good advice you may be able to learn to manage your continence, or find treatment to reduce the effects of incontinence caused by illness or disability.

It is understandable that some people worry because they have an incontinence problem. It is never easy to talk about such personal matters. However, many kinds of incontinence can be treated and cured, no matter how old the person is. This Infosheet suggests some ways of finding help. If one way does not suit you, or does not work out, do try another. The result could make a big difference to you or the person you look after.

## **Different ways in which incontinence may affect you**

Incontinence is a difficult and embarrassing problem for those men and women who suffer from it. Although incontinence can be a symptom of a more serious illness, it frequently arises from a problem which can be treated. The types of incontinence and some of the more common causes are described below.

### **Incontinence of urine**

#### **Stress urinary incontinence**

This is the most common type of urinary incontinence. In this case, muscle weakness can cause what is known as stress incontinence - leaking of the urine when you laugh, sneeze, cough or take exercise. This is weakness, not of the bladder muscles, but of the 'pelvic floor muscles' surrounding the base of the bladder. These are called pelvic floor muscles, and they can be exercised to improve their strength. You can find out more about this from a nurse, doctor or physiotherapist, or from the printed information listed under 'Leaflets and publications'. You may be referred for physiotherapy, or if you have a severe problem, to a specialist who may be able to advise regarding an operation

#### **Urge urinary incontinence**

In this case, there is a sudden strong desire to pass urine which cannot be ignored. Normally as your bladder fills, your brain gives you plenty of warning so that you can reach the toilet in time. With some people, this does not happen. Muscles in the bladder contract more often than normal and with little warning. This can cause leakage of urine.

It may be accompanied by the need to pass urine frequently – maybe every half an hour – which is known as 'frequency'. These symptoms can also be due to a urinary infection, and you should see your doctor as they may respond to antibiotics.

If it is not an infection you may be advised to try what is called bladder training. Here the aim is to teach you techniques that allow you to ignore the urge to pass urine. This should help you return to a more normal pattern of no more than six to eight times a day. The doctor may prescribe some medicine to relax the bladder and make it less necessary to empty often.

#### **Leaking**

You may have dribbling or leaking. This may only happen occasionally, but it is still a worry. In men, this can be caused by changes in the prostate gland. Problems may also arise through constipation, which can cause pressure on the bladder, and lead to 'leaking'. Change of diet or other ways of helping the constipation may help this problem as well. Once again, to discover the cause, see your doctor.

#### **Nocturia**

This means being woken up at least twice during the night to pass urine. In general, it affects older people more than younger adults and is more usual in those over 60. If this significantly disturbs your sleep, it may leave you feeling

constantly tired during the day. If this affects your physical health and mental wellbeing, it is important to raise this with your doctor.

If you need to go to the toilet during the night, ensure that the route is well lit or keep a torch by the bed. Also check the route and make sure there are no hazards such as shoes on the floor or furniture to negotiate that might cause you to trip or fall.

### **Functional incontinence**

Functional incontinence is due to practical difficulties such as:

- inability to remove clothes easily, or
- inability to reach the toilet in time due to mobility difficulties or unnecessary obstructions such as awkwardly placed furniture.

It will be important to consider whether there are physical barriers that prevent you reaching the toilet in time and make changes if you can.

### **Incontinence of bowels**

You, or someone you look after, may have a problem with incontinence of the bowels. This may have a variety of causes, including damage to muscles or the nerves supplying the muscles around the back passage. It can also be due to constipation, even though the effects seem like diarrhoea. Sometimes medication can make the problem worse.

It may be possible to control and reduce the effects of bowel incontinence by changing your daily routine, by eating different foods (for example more roughage or fibre), and by drinking plenty of fluids. Exercise may also help. However, if your problem persists, consult your doctor as it could be more serious.

### **Some common problems and steps which might help**

Sometimes you may not be able to manage long periods between going to the toilet. This may cause you to feel embarrassed, or worried that you may have an 'accident'. You may be able to help to overcome this, by making sure you use the toilet regularly, say every two or three hours, or by learning to achieve better control.

Sometimes, conditions like a stroke can lead to loss of control of urine, and sometimes conditions such as dementia can make it difficult for people to control their bladders. In some cases, using the toilet regularly may reduce or solve the problem.

Depending on what is causing your problem, other steps which may help you to manage are: ensuring clothing is easy to unfasten; ensuring the route to the toilet is safe, well lit, and easy to manage; finding out whether exercises or change of diet might help. For all types of urine incontinence, it is important to continue to drink fluids – around six glasses or one to one and a half litres per day - and perhaps more early in the day than in the evening. You could consider cutting down on drinks containing caffeine, such as tea and coffee and other drinks that may irritate the bladder like fizzy drinks and alcohol.

It is important to pay attention to skin care, as incontinence may cause irritation.

You should be able to get advice about this from some of the services listed under Further Information

### **What help may be available**

You should always seek advice about incontinence, as early as possible, so that the cause can be diagnosed and the problem solved where possible.

The first step will be for you to be assessed by an appropriately trained professional. As well as a physical examination, the effect of your symptoms on the quality of your life, and your view about alternative treatments should be reviewed. Following from the assessment, a management/treatment plan should be discussed and agreed with you, and a copy given to you.

Initial treatment is usually undertaken through your doctor's surgery or your local clinic, and may include:

- general advice about healthy living, in particular diet and drinking appropriate fluids
- bladder and bowel training programmes
- improving quality and access to toilet facilities
- pelvic floor exercises
- provision of pads, continence aids and other supplies
- reviewing/modifying existing medication
- taking regular, light exercise
- choosing more easily removable clothing

Pads should not be made available without an initial assessment, as to do so can result in inappropriate dependence upon them. Everyone who receives long-term supplies should be re-assessed at least annually to ensure that his/her needs have not changed, and that there is not a newer product available which may be more suitable.

Pads should be provided in quantities appropriate to the individual's needs. People with bowel incontinence should not have to reuse the same pad after it has become soiled, as serious skin complications can develop.

**NOTE:** INSALUD may provide incontinency pads and other supplies if you are covered by the EU Reciprocal Agreement (Form E121).

### **Who might help?**

Your doctor can help to identify the cause of your incontinence, give treatment or advice, and tell you about other help available in your district which may be a physiotherapist who might suggest exercises or a hospital specialist in geriatrics, psychogeriatrics, urodynamics, gynaecology, urology or neurology.

You may consider buying or borrowing equipment and/or supplies. Although it is important to see whether incontinence can be treated, there may be times when you need equipment or clothing, particularly if you want to travel or be out for long periods of time. A wide range of helpful products are now available for sale, and your doctor can advise you.

If you are going to borrow equipment, especially if you are going to be away from home, it may be possible to borrow a commode or a toilet seat from your local Age Concern, Red Cross or equipment hire shop.

### **Advice services and telephone helplines**

You may feel that you would like information about your incontinence problem from someone other than a doctor.

**The Continence Foundation** can provide general information and advice. Some publications are listed below in the section headed 'Leaflets and publications' below.

Telephone Helpline: 0044 845 345 0165, 9.30am - 1.00pm (GMT) weekdays.

Fax: 0044 20 7404 6876

Email: [continence-help@dial.pipex.com](mailto:continence-help@dial.pipex.com)

Website: [www.continence-foundation.org.uk](http://www.continence-foundation.org.uk)

Address: 307 Hatton Square, 16 Baldwins Gardens, London, EC1N 7RJ

**InContact** is a national charity for people affected by bowel and bladder problems. A range of booklets and information sheets are available to be downloaded from their website. Single copies can be sent free of charge to UK addresses only.

Telephone: 0044 870 770 3246

Fax: 0044 870 770 3249

Email: [info@incontact.org](mailto:info@incontact.org)

Website: [www.incontact.org](http://www.incontact.org)

Address: United House, North Road, London N7 9DP

Some companies which sell incontinence products in the UK have telephone advice services which you might find helpful. You can also write for information. Some of these are:

**Bard Limited** Freephone Helpline: 0800 591 783 (UK only) 12.30pm - 4.30pm (GMT) weekdays

Telephone from abroad: 0044 1293 527888

Fax: 0044 1293 538697 or 552428

Email: [customer.services@crbard.com](mailto:customer.services@crbard.com)

Website: [www.crbard.com](http://www.crbard.com)

Address: Forest House, Brighton Road, Crawley, West Sussex RH11 9BP

**Coloplast Limited** Freephone Helpline: 0800 220 622 (UK only) 8.00am - 6.00pm weekdays, 9.00am – 2.00pm Saturday (GMT)

Telephone from abroad: 0044 1733 392000

Fax: 00441733 233348

Website: [www.coloplast.co.uk](http://www.coloplast.co.uk)

Address: Customer Care Department, Coloplast Ltd., Peterborough  
Business Park, Peterborough PE2 6FX  
Booklets/information on different kinds of incontinence are available free of charge from Coloplast Service but only posted to a UK address.

### **Hollister Ltd. Advisory Service**

**Freephone Helpline:** 0800 521 377 (UK only). 9.00am - 5.00pm weekdays

Telephone from abroad: 0044 118 989 5000

Fax: 044 118 9775 881

Website: [www.hollister.com/uk](http://www.hollister.com/uk)

Address: Hollister Ltd., Rectory Court, 42 Broad Street, Wokingham, Berks, RG40 1AB

Booklets/information on different kinds of incontinence are available free of charge from Hollister Ltd but only posted to a UK address.

### **Leaflets and publications**

The Continence Foundation (see contact details above) has a number of leaflets available: single copies of leaflets are free within the UK; for orders from other countries, please contact the Foundation for postage costs. Titles are:

The well behaved bladder  
The well behaved bowel  
Only when I laugh  
Helping you help yourself  
Calling all men  
The overactive bladder  
Surgery for stress incontinence  
After-dribble: a few drops too late

The following detailed factsheets are also available from the Continence Foundation at a single sheet cost of £1.50 each and most can be downloaded from their website (see above):

1. The Confused Incontinent Person at Home
2. Penile Sheaths
3. Washable Pads and Pants
4. Reusable Bedpans
5. Advice for Relatives
6. Bladder Control after a Prostate operation
7. Faecal Incontinence
8. Controlling Wind and Smells
9. Sphincter Exercises to aid Bowel Control
10. Skin Care for people with Bowel problems
11. Your Sphincter Repair Operation
12. The Overactive Bladder
13. What is Urodynamics
14. Pelvic Floor Exercises for men
15. Surgery for Stress Incontinence
16. Nocturia
17. After-Dribble
18. An Introduction to Bladder Control Problems

## 19. The Pelvic Floor and Stress Incontinence

Other publications which may be helpful and which may be found in UK bookshops include:

**Women's Waterworks: curing incontinence** by Pauline Chiarelli. Price £6.95 plus delivery. Neen Healthcare, telephone: 00 44 161 925 3180. Gives positive and encouraging advice about stress incontinence.

**Managing incontinence:** a guide to living with loss of bladder control edited by Cheryl B. Gartley. Price £8.95 paperback. Souvenir Press; telephone: 00 44 20 7580 9307. An American book revised for Britain. Offers practical advice and ways of boosting confidence for incontinence sufferers.

**Prostate problems** by J.Hammand. Price £7.99. Available from Thorsons, Harper Collins Publishers, PO Box, Glasgow G4 0NB, Scotland.

Some of the above publications can be ordered through the **Continence Foundation's Book Service** (postage and packing charges apply); contact the Incontinence Information Helpline for details.

**Bladder and bowel problems** by Kerry Lee. Price £6.99. Age Concern England and InContact, telephone: 00 44 870 44 22 120 or email: [sales@ageconcernbooks.co.uk](mailto:sales@ageconcernbooks.co.uk)

If you are visiting the UK, many chemists stock useful publications.

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, services or publications in this Infosheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Concern. Whilst every effort is made to ensure accuracy, Age Concern cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions.

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For further information ring INFOLINE on (+34) 971 718794 or send an email to [info@ageconcern-espana.org](mailto:info@ageconcern-espana.org)